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MY INSECT QUEEN.

A Novel.

BY THE AUTHOR

OF

"MARGARET'S ENGAGEMENT."

"As, rising on her purple wing,
The Insect Queen of Eastern Spring,
O'er emerald meadows of Kashmeer,
Invites the young pursuer near,
And leads him on from flower to flower,
A weary chase, and wasted hour,—
So Beauty lures the full-grown child."

THE GIAOUR.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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MY ASSISTANT.

CHAPTER I.

DR. GUY CROFTON.

"Through many an hour of summer suns,
By many pleasant ways,
Like Hezekiah's, backward runs
The shadow of my days."

TENNYSON.

ON the morning of the 9th October, last year, I came down to breakfast in an unusually serene frame of mind. By this, I mean, not that the frame of mind was in itself unusual with me. Quite the contrary. None of my friends, acquaintance, or dependents, can say with truth, that they ever saw Guy Crofton thoroughly

out of temper. I am admitted, on all hands, to be a remarkably good-tempered man—I only mean to say that the degree of serenity, on that morning, was unusual even with me.

It arose from several causes. First, that tedious chancery suit was ended—a suit that had been "trailing its slow length along" through two generations, that had been a dismal heir-loom in my family, and had, indeed, survived all of those in whose interests it was supposed (by highly imaginative lawyers) to have been instituted. There was not so very much left, certainly, but, by the death of the first heirs, all that was, devolved upon me, and as they had been wasteful, extravagant people, those deceased relatives of mine, it was well for me that the suit had outlived them, or they would doubtless have squandered it all away, and, if I have little of it now, I should in that case have had none at all; "All's well that ends well." Moreover, it

is only "little" in comparison with what it should have been; it is much to me.

A clear fifteen hundred pounds a year is a pretty little competence in a quiet country village, and for a bachelor, without encumbrance *at present*. My twenty-five years' practice as a country surgeon has not realised a fortune, still I have some comfortable savings laid by, and with this accession to my income, I may surely look on myself as being a little above the world, and able at any time that I may please to retire from my profession, live as a gentleman at ease, and even, if I chose to indulge so costly a whim, marry a wife with no dower but her charms! Such prospects naturally conduce to serenity of mind.

Then, I had just returned from a trip to London, taken partly to confer with my lawyers, touching the successful business aforesaid, partly to make the acquaintance of a gentleman, whom, at the recommendation of my old friend, Sir James Phillips, I

had engaged as my Assistant, *vice* Mr. Swinely, dismissed for—never mind what! And though I had not succeeded in this latter object, Mr. Roland Wentworth having been called suddenly out of town, I had received so highly satisfactory an account of him from Sir James, that I was disposed to congratulate myself on having secured a coadjutor, and probably partner, likely to prove so efficient.

I am not an old man—indeed a man of fifty is in the very prime and flower of life —still, having worked my way to my present position (independently of the law-suit, of course) I think it is but fair that I should enjoy it, and leave the toil, the nightwork especially, to younger men, who must work their way in turn. I am not one of those selfish chaps who never give a fellow a chance. My assistant, I resolved, should have all the parish work,—make himself popular among the farmers and tradesmen,—and all the nightwork too.

Since Swinely departed, that night-bell had never ceased ringing a single night. I believe half my patients go to sleep in the day-time, on purpose to call me up in the night, and snarl at me next day for not obeying their summons—as I take good care not to do. Doctors need sleep, and I require uninterrupted slumber. I am fretful if disturbed. Young fellows of Wentworth's age like sitting up; they can sit up night after night for their own amusement; but I lead a quiet life, and keep regular hours, and never could abide the night-bell. That most appalling of surgical instruments, (at least, to the surgeon himself), had been mute the whole of that night. Never once had it tinkled or pealed; it could not, very well, for I had tied it up in a bit of wash-leather. Consequently, I had enjoyed a heavenly slumber, and that was another reason that I came down to breakfast in a frame of mind of unusual serenity.

Very snug my bachelor parlour looked; the breakfast cloth spotless, the silver irreproachably bright, the coffee steaming fragrant, the "finnan haddie" on the table, the toast on the hot-water plate. I rang the bell, no Ariel could appear more deftly—yet my housekeeper, Mrs. Pritchard, is no Ariel, but a woman of sixty, gaunt and fleshless, yellow as parchment, but with bright black eyes, that tell of a tenacious vitality.

She had been bequeathed to me by my predecessor at Cleobury, and having grown old in the service of medical men, she seemed quite to consider herself as one of the profession. She had picked up at odd times some professional phraseology, and was proud of showing her learning, by parading it on still odder occasions, and with an application and pronunciation oddest of all. She tyrannised over me a little, of course, but on the whole we got on very well together, though, like most old people, she annoyed me sometimes, by

talking as if all the world must feel itself getting old, as fast as *she* did.

"Mrs. Pritchard, are there no letters to-day?"

"Letters, Dr. Guy! in course there be; see, you have put the dish cover over 'em, sir."

"So I have! Well, bring up my boots."

I glance over the letters—nothing of consequence. Ah! this is from Wentworth.

"My dear Sir,

"Your note reached me this morning, on my return from Northwych, where I had been suddenly summoned to the sick bed of a dear friend. I regret that it was therefore not in my power to comply with your wish, that I should accompany you back to Cleobury, but I will lose no time in following you, and shall hope to arrive by the last train at Lingford to-morrow night.

"Yours, &c.,

"Roland Wentworth."

"So, Mrs. Pritchard, where's Jenkin?"

"He's gone to bring round your trap, sir."

"Well, tell him to saddle Whitefoot instead; the trap must go to Lingford to-night, to meet the mail train, and bring Mr. Wentworth here."

"Mr. Wentworth? That's the new assistant, sir?"

"Even so, my friend."

"I'm glad he's coming. At your time of life, you ought to take rest, and leave hard work to the youngsters."

"At my time of life, you old crone! one would think that I was as aged as you are! Mrs. Pritchard, what will you say if I give up work altogether, and go to live at Rosebank, and take a pretty wife there with me?"

"I'll believe that when I see it, Dr. Guy, you've cried 'wolf' too often to scare me—you'll be an old bachelor to the end of the chapter."

"Why, I'm not an *old* bachelor yet."

"Well, there's older nor you as marries, but you've allus let the young ladies slip through your fingers, as one may say, and them as is so long a-making up their minds seem never to know when it's getting too late; they goes on and on—"

"Ill-boding sibyl, avaunt! go at once and countermand the trap—hand me the paper first—and get Mr. Wentworth's room ready for him."

My attendant vanished; but the echo of her unpleasant utterance seemed lingering in my brain. "Old bachelor," quoth she, well, I suppose I am an "old" bachelor in the sense in which a still young woman is called an "old" maid. I little thought in the days of my first love, that I should be a bachelor at forty-nine. I always intended to be married before I was twenty-five—before I was thirty—before I was forty-five; but Byron's lines have a special application to my case—

"So beauty lures the full grown child,
And leads him on from flower to flower
A wearied chase and wasted hour."

No, hang it, not that; the chase is not weary yet, nor shall the hour be wasted! I will have a wife before I am fifty. That is, in my opinion, the very earliest age at which a man can be correctly termed an "old" bachelor. I will—

In comes Mrs. Pritchard again with a significant grin on her crumpled countenance.

"Dr. Guy, is Mr. Wentworth a handsome gentleman?"

"I don't know, I never saw him; what is it to you, you frivolous old woman?"

"Laws, sir, it's nothing to me, only you know there's Miss Graysbrooke may fancy him, and your nose will be put out of joint, or your old flame, Miss Barham—"

"Mrs. Pritchard, you are transgressing; no young lady's name is a permitted topic for jesting in my house. Leave the room."

Exit Mrs. P. abashed, but leaving behind her a train of reflection as long—but not as bright—as the train of a comet. A comet —nay, the names she had mentioned, were rather suggestive of my morning and evening stars. Annie Barham, my first love, what a sweet creature she was to be sure, twenty-five years ago! I have seen hundreds of prettier women since, but none—no, not one—who could boast the nameless charm I then found in Annie; I loved her and meant to tell her so; but I was only a medical student then, with little fortune of my own, and while I hesitated, her father, the old vicar died, and Annie went away to be a governess. I did not forget her, but gradually I found greater attractions in the society of the girls present than in the memory of the absent. I had usually two or three of such attachments on hand, and while I was debating which was the most powerful, they all married; one after another was drafted into the ranks of the "wives and mothers

of England," but I was sure of Annie at any time. There was a report current once at Cleobury, that she was courted by a young officer from India (he's a Colonel now), and the report gained ground when she came for a few weeks' visit to a friend at Lingford, and the young officer followed, and was even seen with her at church. I have never forgiven myself for my conduct on that occasion. Being still unprepared to commit myself to a direct proposal, I ought not to have rekindled hopes in dear Annie's bosom, by a renewal of attentions, a softness of manner, a tenderness of tone and glance, which, alas! was fatally misinterpreted; for mark the result: the young officer disappeared. It was rumoured everywhere, that Miss Barham had refused him, and thus I am guilty of having ruined the poor girl's prospects in life; for he went back to India, and consoled himself by marrying another lady.

Only five or six years ago, the Vicar,

who had succeeded old Barham, was promoted to a richer living, and that of Cleobury was given to Annie's only brother, and she came back to live with him and his wife. But she was changed and faded then, and of course had far too much good sense to expect any renewal of the love-passages of her youth. Why, she was thirty-nine then—which is certainly long past a woman's prime — though I was a young man still. But we were still close friends. I have a warm affection for Annie. Yes, she was my Morning Star, paling in the sunlight of noon, and Monica Graysbrooke, I call my Evening Star—although twilight has not closed on me yet—and Monica, bright, fitful, sparkling, is more like a meteor than a star. No, my Evening Star has not risen yet!

Here old Pritchard looked in again.

"The horse is at the door, Doctor."

"All right."

But still I mused. The stupid old wo-

of England," but I was sure of Annie at any time. There was a report current once at Cleobury, that she was courted by a young officer from India (he's a Colonel now), and the report gained ground when she came for a few weeks' visit to a friend at Lingford, and the young officer followed, and was even seen with her at church. I have never forgiven myself for my conduct on that occasion. Being still unprepared to commit myself to a direct proposal, I ought not to have rekindled hopes in dear Annie's bosom, by a renewal of attentions, a softness of manner, a tenderness of tone and glance, which, alas! was fatally misinterpreted; for mark the result: the young officer disappeared. It was rumoured everywhere, that Miss Barham had refused him, and thus I am guilty of having [illegible] the poor girl's prospects in life; [illegible] back to India, and consoled [illegible] marrying another lady.

Only five or six y[illegible]

man had evoked a throng of long-buried memories, that stalk before me, so dim and wan—I had not thought my past youth was left so far behind me! It is a pity that women cannot keep step with us in descending into the Vale of Years. Always precipitate (against their wishes, in this case), they *will* run on before us! Otherwise, if I should feel inclined—some ten years hence—to make a prudent marriage, Annie Barham, with her calm good sense, her ladylike manners, her gentle temper, would be a pleasant companion with whom to face the dread Evening Shadows. But, dear me! she is so changed *now* from what I remember her—what will she be like *then?* No, I'll not wait so long. Before I have passed my fiftieth year I will have a wife. Not a chit of eighteen, like little Monica, whom I received in my arms when first she entered this world of woe; no, nor yet a faded spinster, nor a hackneyed widow. I will find some charming woman of a suit-

able age—not too young, say twenty-five—a woman with sense to prize a pleasant home and a loving husband, who has some share of good looks—I think I may say that—and whose fidelity will be surer than that of a flighty young fellow, who never knows his own mind a week together—"from flower to flower"—Heigho! I mounted my horse and rode off to see my patients, feeling not quite so serene as when I came down to breakfast; but the cloud was a light one, and soon passed over, as clouds usually *do* pass over with me.

CHAPTER II.

MY NEIGHBOURS.

Our village of Cleobury is situated amid some of the sweetest scenery in one of the loveliest counties of England, but it has little beauty of its own to boast of. There is Deerbrook, lying in a secluded valley, at the foot of wooded hills, its tiny, thatched cottages looking like a colony of birds' nests in the shelter of the hollow, through which glances and ripples its alder-shaded stream. There is Brakefield, with its cluster of cottages, tiny as Deerbrook's, their bright gardens filled with tall, gay flowers, like a maiden behind a bouquet half as big as herself, standing all a-row, on either side the

railway that passes between them, as if the new ones had just come by the train, and the old ones were waiting to go off by it. There is Gorsebro', Lady Chelmer's model village, with its gabled roofs, its latticed panes, its timely clipped yews and laurels, so like a rural scene in a theatre, that I always think it ought to be looked at by a blaze of gaslight, to the music of an orchestral band. But our poor old Cleobury is like none of these. It is just a long, irregular street of houses—for the most part shabby and mean—that straggle lazily along the great hill on which they are built, but stop half way up, as if they did not care enough about the prospect to climb any higher to look at it. Yellow or white-washed houses, of which the most pretentious conceal their ugliness behind a screen of wistaria or pyracanthus, as an elderly female wears a spotted veil. The Tyme, it is true, winds near it—the beautiful Tyme, that bubbles and flashes through

the woodland banks of Deerbrook — and brawls and foams through the rocky glens of Gorsebro', but creeps and sprawls over the marshy feet of Cleobury, quite depressed by the ugliness of the place. The church is ashamed of it too, it stands in a nook of the valley, withdrawn from the main street, hidden behind the shoulder of the hill, in a kind of proud exclusiveness. Besides the Rectory, we have but three good houses in the parish—Rosebank, which is to be my retreat, one day, the Cedars, where Major Graysbrooke and his daughter live, and Fernhill, nearly two miles distant, the seat of Sir Charles Cotgrave, Baronet, Lord of the Manor, and M.F.H. Think of that, oh Deerbrook and Brakefield! envy and admire! we have a Baronet and a pack of foxhounds; which is the most valuable of these possessions is a moot point. The men would give it in favour of the foxhounds, though Sir Charles is a right good fellow too; but the ladies would be all for

the Baronet, for he is not only a good fellow, and a keen sportsman, but he is young, rich, good-looking, and—a widower!

The society of Cleobury proper is somewhat limited, but of course we are not confined within those limits. The smallest of the parishes around us can contribute at least a parson or two, with a wife or a pretty daughter, to our occasional dinners or picnics, and sometimes they are accompanied by brothers or cousins—university students, or officers on leave—when we muster very strong, at archery parties or flower-shows.

We are within an easy drive of the market-town of Lingford, where lots of strangers come to admire its church and castle, and which is surrounded by noblemen's and gentlemen's seats—"tons" with whom we can claim in general no very close intimacy, but who vouchsafe to recognise our existence by a nod or a smile, as they drive past us, or by an occasional invitation to

an "omnium gatherum" at croquet or cricket. And on the strength of these illustrious presences we do not fail to boast that Cleobury has a most aristocratic neighbourhood. So, at least, Major Graysbrooke of the Cedars constantly affirmed.

The Cedars, which represents all the architectural gentility of Cleobury, is a comfortable, old-fashioned dwelling, solidly built of grey stone, with red-brick copings, which look like eyebrows, beneath which its small, low windows look down in a supercilious sort of way, on the houses in the street below it, through an imposing "bocage" of chestnut and purple beech. The cedar which stood sponsor to it is now as decayed as the house itself, or its former owners—a wretched cedar, ragged and scraggy—even the sparrows frequent it under protest. The "grounds," as the Major magniloquently terms them, consist of a grass-plot planted with evergreens, and bordered by a little shrubbery path,

which he calls "the avenue," leading a hundred yards or so, to the road. The whole is surrounded by a low parapet wall, from which, if you look over it, you have a home and homely view of a beer-shop on the one side, and a slaughter-house on the other. But then, no one ever does look over the parapet—such indiscretion being guarded against by a tangle of laurels and privet-bushes, which the ever-imaginative Major styles "the coppice," and which serves for a fashionable evening promenade for all the cats in Cleobury.

The Cedars had formerly belonged to a Lingford lawyer—a man of some wealth, but of gloomy, unsocial habits; he was a widower, with an only daughter, whom he had immured in the solitude of this gloomy old mansion, until the youth of the village dubbed her "old maid." He left her, at his death, heiress to a considerable fortune, and thereupon the lady arose and went forth to see the world and be seen by it,

She went to Leamington, carrying with her a reputation for present wealth and past beauty—of which last she still retained some remnant—and by these united possessions she captivated Major Graysbrooke, who wooed and won her, and returned with her to her early home. There, in due time, she enriched the world with a daughter, whom I, Guy Crofton, was the honoured instrument of presenting to the scene which she so embellishes.

The Major found Cleobury dull, and persuaded his wife that her delicate health was owing to there being too many trees round the place, and he took her away to Leamington again, where, after languishing a year or two, she died. Her fortune had been strictly settled on herself, and left at her own disposal in the event of her marriage, and she had bequeathed it all to her child. Neither principal nor interest could pass through the father's hands, and the Major inherited nothing except the Cedars

and some small tenements appertaining to it. I believe the beer-shop was one.

He must have been disappointed, but he was gifted with much of the philosophy that makes the best of the inevitable, and he was true to that philosophy here. The only way to realise any advantage from his inheritance was to live in it, since after time and money vainly expended in the most enticing advertisements, no one could be prevailed on to rent it, and having only a life interest in it, he could not sell it. Accordingly, he came and lived in it, and for all that at present appeared, he meant to live in it until he died in it.

He had become reconciled to the dulness of the village, or, perhaps he had ceased to feel it as years stole on. He was content with his position there as one of "the Upper Ten," as he called it—he would have been more accurate in saying one of the Upper Two—and took as much pride in settling disputed points of social etiquette

among his neighbours as if he had been Lord High Chamberlain to some German King. He seemed to find sufficing happiness in his daily vinegar bath, his brisk "constitutional" after breakfast, his bottle of claret after dinner, and his evening hit at backgammon or game at chess, with any neighbour who might "drop in." This routine he had followed with little variation for the last ten years, and it seemed likely that he might continue it for twenty more—though he was already long past his sixtieth year.

Of the Major's antecedents, before he appeared among us as the husband of the Lingford heiress, little was known at Cleobury; but by people who make it their business to find out everything about everybody—people who could tell you who Cain and Abel married—it was rumoured that Major Graysbrooke had risen from the ranks, that he had eloped while yet a private, with a lady of rank and fortune, who

had taken a fancy to his handsome face and figure, and that her relatives had prudently made the best of the mésalliance, by purchasing him a commission in a regiment serving abroad, where their influence and his own adroitness had raised him to his present position. This rumour may have had no other foundation than in the fact that he was never known to speak of his own relatives, although he was communicative enough about his first wife's, with whom he was always on friendly terms. People called him selfish and silly, but he was wise enough to know his own interests, and willing to further the interests of others, when they did not clash with his own. Fiery as a passionate child when offended, he was as placable and easy to soothe—always courteous and gay, strictly moral, and pious—after his fashion, a kind husband, a fond father. There may be men higher and nobler than the old Major, but there are many more far less worthy.

My engagements had kept me beyond my usual dinner-hour—indeed I had had no regular dinner-hour since Swineley left me, and a farmer at Brakefield, whose son I was attending, persuaded me to stop and dine with him at five o'clock. The train, by which my Assistant was to arrive, would not be due till nine, and the nearest station at which that train stopped was seven miles off, so, when I rode homewards after dinner, I had still some hours of the evening to dispose of, and I thought I could not do better than turn in at the Cedars, and have a game at backgammon with the old Major, and perhaps a song from his only daughter, Monica, who had but lately returned from school to be installed as mistress (heaven save the mark) of her father's house.

So to the Cedars I went, as I had been in the habit of doing much oftener since it had been graced by the presence of a fair young girl. For here I will frankly admit

that to me there is nothing in the universe so exquisite, so fascinating, so irresistibly alluring, as a young girl! A girl in the first dawn of earliest womanhood, fresh and fragrant as a flower, and alas! as fragile, for that bloom of youth is as evanescent as it is lovely, and its loss is never, to my mind, compensated by any maturer charm. Let who will inhale the perfume of the opening rose, but the sweet shy mystery of the folded bud for me! A young girl could at any time wind me round her little finger—could make me commit any folly but that of marrying her—I always stop short of that, for what say my favourite lines :—

> "Every touch that woos its stay,
> Hath brushed its brightest hues away."

I could gaze for ever on my "Insect Queen," without a thought of tarnishing her brilliance by a touch. Let her sport her brief moment before me, and flap her unsullied wings in the sun; I never wish

to fasten her down with the pin of a marriage bond, to shrivel on the cork of matronly duty! If some other hand reach forth and snatch away my living gem, well and good—I am never long unconsoled. One comfort in having lived half a century is that one has seen so many relays of young girls, and "the cry is still, they come! they come!"

CHAPTER III.

MONICA GRAYSBROOKE.

"You trust a woman who puts forth
Her blossoms thick as summer's?
You think she knows what love is worth,
Who casts it to new comers?"

E. B. Browning.

On entering the large, long, low-ceiled parlour, at the Cedars, it was at once evident that I had reckoned without my host, as to the hit at backgammon, whatever might be my chance for the song. Major Graysbrooke was playing at chess with Frank Temple, the tutor, or, as wags irreverently styled him, the nurse-boy of Sir Charles Cotgrave's little son.

The Major was a spare, slightly made

man of sixty-eight, with delicate, clearly-cut features, watery blue eyes with red rims—like turquoises set in coral—a sanguine complexion, and glistening steel-white hair, brushed into a point, like a pyramid of knives in a cutler's shop. All that keen-looking hair might have been piled up for safety, for there was not so much as a blade, I mean a bristle, on the close shaven lips and chin. He sat in his deep-cushioned, easy chair, before a roasting fire, that seemed rather to incommode his adversary, a slim, weedy looking youth, of the class that ladies call "so interesting," with a small head, a long neck and nose, and a receding chin, that gave him the air of "a goosey-goosey-gander," a bird, which, as far as intelligence goes, had no cause to feel flattered by the resemblance.

But I did not linger long in the contemplation of the silent chess-players—there was metal more attractive to me in the girl who leant on the back of her father's chair,

ostensibly watching the progress of the game, though her eyes wandered often from the pieces of the elder player to the face of the younger, with seeming carelessness, yet the flush that alternately deepened and paled on Frank Temple's cheek had evidently a much closer relation to those innocent glances than to the chances of the game, in which he made such frequent blunders.

Must I describe Monica Graysbrooke? Can an artist paint a cloud in the sunset, a blossom in the dewfall, a bird on the wing? he may do so with more or less success if the bird be a heavy-winged black and white magpie, the flower a pink-striped tulip, the cloud "very like a whale;" but Monica! the rainbow mist is not more changeful, as sunlight gilds or shadow softens it—the hues of the violet are not more tenderly shaded, as it quivers beneath the dew-drop's weight, not more variable the glittering plumage of the humming-bird, as it hovers

over the datura's silver bell! Talk of chameleons! the most versatile chameleon that ever changed colour, is a mere eft compared to Monica. It is no description of her to say that her form, though mignonne, is rounded and full (for Monica is the very plumpest of fairies), that her hair is gold brown, her eyes deep blue, with, oh! such long fringes! that her complexion is waxen-white, with tints of vivid crimson flushing through it on cheek and rosebud mouth—this is a mere barren inventory of common attractions. How can I describe the animation and vivacity of that form in movement, its easy gracefulness in repose? how can I show the charming infantine gesture with which she tosses from her smooth, low forehead, the silken curls always in pretty disorder—looped back with pink or blue ribbons that *will* come untied, or with bead combs that *will* fall out. Could you but see those blue eyes peer sleepily at you from beneath their lowered lashes, or fix

on yours with the wide, questioning glance of an innocent child, or droop (they are loveliest then!) on the soft cheek, where blushes are so frequent, that, were it not a medical heresy, I could swear that Monica can blush at will! Then that sweetest little mouth, sometimes arch, sometimes serious, round which the fugitive dimples come and go, all but one, which nestles permanently on the baby-chin. She reminds me of a motto I once saw to a pretty picture in the National Gallery—

> "Standing with reluctant feet,
> Where the wave and river meet,
> Womanhood and childhood fleet."

She looked up as I entered, and there was all a child's impulsiveness in the little cry of delight with which she sprang forward to meet me, and laid her two little plump hands in mine. There was something of maidenly bashfulness, too, in her coy withdrawal of them, when, taking the

privilege of a very old friendship, I lifted the pretty hands to my lips.

The old Major nodded to me, and said to Frank Temple, who half rose from his chair, "Sit down, Frank, don't upset the chess-board—we make no stranger of Dr. Guy. Doctor, our young friend here will check-mate me in five minutes, and meantime Money will amuse you, I can trust you with my Money—eh, Doctor?"

And chuckling at this small stock joke of his, the Major resumed his game, while I, nothing loth, took the seat Miss Graysbrooke offered me on the sofa beside her, and chuckled in my turn, to see the side-long glance of jealous envy with which that foolish fellow Temple followed me.

"And how am I to amuse you, Dr. Guy?" asked the dear little maid. "Shall I talk to you or sing to you, or—no, I'll scold you—why have you never come near me for five whole days?"

"Why, Monica, you know that since I

lost my Assistant my time has been so much occupied—"

"I don't know anything of the kind," she interrupted, "the people say you never trouble yourself to go anywhere now, unless there is danger, and not always then if you can send anyone else in your place."

"Do not believe the Cleobury grumblers, my child; if I attended their summons on every trifling occasion that they chose to send for me, I should never have a moment to give to my friends. Besides, I have been up to London on business; I only came back last night."

"Ah! you have been to London? have you brought me what you promised, from London, Doctor?"

"What was that?" I asked, dissembling.

"If you have forgotten, I will never forgive you! you promised that the first time you went up to town, you would bring me your photograph for my album."

"Nonsense, my dear Miss Graysbrooke,

what can you want with an ugly old fellow's photograph ?"

"I am not Miss Graysbrooke—to *you*—and I want no old fellow's photo — but I will have yours—ah ! you have got it after all ! now you are very good, and you shall have a place of honour in my album—but (looking at the picture I gave her, with a little grimace) it is not a flattering likeness, Dr. Guy."

"Photography rarely flatters, Monica, and it cannot represent me as an Apollo, you know," and I waited a little anxiously for her reply. She had risen in her eagerness to receive the picture, and now stood before me, looking contemplatively at me, her dimpled hands folded before her, with the photograph in their clasp—her head on one side, like a petted bird's :—

"'Apollo !'" she repeated scornfully, "Apollos are only good in marble ! (I was certainly not marble !) but this picture has not your style—there is nothing *distingué* about it."

Distingué! could Monica be flattering me, or—or—quizzing me? No, she was gravely in earnest, no suspicion of ridicule played in her eyes or on her lips. Dear little thing, she really thought me *distingué* looking, and though I knew I was nothing of the kind, her simplicity pleased me. I once overheard our curate's wife, Mrs. Gabriel Hartopp, call me "a little tub of a man." Horrid, coarse creature, that Mrs. Hartopp! still I should never have expected any girl to call me *distingué* unless, indeed, she had been in love with me; and that, of course, is out of the question with such a baby as Monica—still—a girl's fancy is so uncertain! Meanwhile, she had brought forth a magnificent gilded and enamelled album that was nearly as big as herself, and proceeded to insert the carte in one of the embossed pages, while I, bending over her, assisted in the ceremony of my own installation.

"Look, Dr. Guy," she prattled on, "this beautiful book is a parting gift from my

school-fellows, and I shall give you the first place in it, opposite papa. As yet my grand album is like an empty drawing-room lighted up for expected guests. I have only these few school friends of mine, Miss Dillon, the lady principal; and Madame, the French mistress; I had Signor Spinelli, the Italian singing master, but Lady Janet Forrester burnt him" (the picture I presume she meant). "She said it was very bad taste in a young lady to keep her singing master's picture, she gave me her own instead, yes, that is hers, with her blue spectacles, but I would rather have had the Signor's because I have so few gentlemen's likenesses."

"You will have more than you have room for, Miss Graysbrooke, if you are so little exclusive," I observed, with some pique, for it was not very flattering to be asked for my picture, if she paid the same compliment to her singing master.

She looked up into my face, with that

bewitching, sly smile of hers, and said with her soft lisp—

"Oh! but *dear* Dr. Guy, I must have a crowd of people I don't care for, to hide my special favourites among. A lady's album is not an *affiche* for her partialities, is it?"

And then she laughed her low, musical laugh, and dropped her eyes, as if fearing the response to the sly, arch glance they had shot forth; cunning little witch!

"But who have we here, Monica? is that one of your late school fellows?"

"Oh! no, that is Lady Janet's Rosa, we became close friends when I was staying at Scarborough this summer with Lady Janet, is she not very handsome?"

"Good-looking enough," I replied, indifferently. I was not so verdant as to praise one pretty woman to another. But it was a very fine head, striking in the haughty grace and spirit of its attitude, and the thoughtful melancholy of the large dark eyes and serious mouth.

"And who is Lady Janet's Rosa, Monica?"

"She is the young lady who came to be Lady Janet's companion; you know she is quite blind now, Dr. Guy."

"I know, and am very sorry for it; hers must be a gloomy house for a young woman to come to."

"Perhaps it is; but her ladyship is as lively as ever, and the house was not gloomy when I was there, Lady Janet always sent Rosamond with me to ride and walk, and Sir Charles Cotgrave was there, and he took us to balls, and concerts, and things, and oh, dear!" sighed the little damsel, piteously, "Scarbro' was so pleasant and Cleobury is so dull!"

"What is that?" cried the Major, who had now finished his game, and turned round to join in our chat. "My little girl complains of Cleobury being dull? You must be in fault, Doctor, you have always been the life and soul of our village."

"It must not be dull, Major, now that she has come among us. Lady Janet comes to Heath Hill next month, there will be parties given everywhere in her honour, and Monica will be the belle of them all. Sir Charles will have his house full of hunting and sporting friends, gay cavaliers from town" (Frank Temple frowned), "Miss Barham will have her Christmas tree for the little ones" (Monica tossed her head), "and her concerts, where Miss Graysbrooke will be *prima donna;* oh, we will be gay enough, never fear."

"You are not going, Temple?" said our host. "Stop and have another game."

"Not this evening, Major Graysbrooke. I promised Charlie, that he should sit up with Sir Charles until I came home, and it is getting late; good-night, Miss Graysbrooke."

"You will come to-morrow?" said Monica, and she drew aside a little, while her voice took a soft, caressing inflection, that

I suspect was seconded by her eyes. A kind hearted little girl is Mona, but she is too unguarded; that silly youth made no secret of being madly in love with her, and he might haye mistaken her manner for encouragement. She added, "Bring Charlie. I have something for him; and I'll sing your song. I have set it to an air that I am sure you will like. Oh, Dr. Crofton, you must hear Mr. Temple's lovely song—it is perfect!"

Decidedly Miss Graysbrooke was flattering young Frank, whose verses were as sentimentally vapid as verses can be (and that is saying a great deal). But these young fellows can swallow any amount of flattery from a pretty girl's lips! The tutor doubtless believed every word she said, and went away, not only convinced that he was a first class poet, but that Miss Graysbrooke thought him so. Naughty little Monica.

"That is a nice gentlemanly lad," observed the Major, as his guest quitted the

room ; "and not a bad chess-player, neither! I really think he would have beaten me to-night, if Money had not distracted his attention with her chatter. I am always happy to see him here ; it is a dull life for a young man to have the care of such a baby as Charlie Cotgrave."

"Oh, he is quite contented!" said Monica, carelessly, "he says he would not leave Heath-hill for worlds ; and as he was not very successful at Cambridge, perhaps he could not teach an older pupil much."

"Not even poetry ?" I enquired, a little maliciously. Yet, indeed, I thought Monica need not have been so *very* gracious to Frank.

"Don't be satirical, Doctor!" and she held up her finger reprovingly, while just the faintest tinge of colour rose to her cheek ; then turning to her father, "Papa, Dr. Crofton brought this from London ; do you think it like ?"

"I will look at it, by and bye, Money.

I have mislaid my glasses," (I could have offered him mine, but I did not own to glasses in public yet). "So, Crofton, you have been to town? The chancery business quite settled, eh? I congratulate you, my dear fellow. You will be retiring from practice, I suppose, settling at your pretty place, Rosebank, and taking a bride to do the honours, there."

"I do not despair of that arrangement, Major;" (and I glanced at Monica. Why do girls always look so conscious and bashful, when a man talks of a probable bride?) "I shall have more time for courting, now, as my new Assistant comes to-night."

"Who is he, Doctor? Will he be any addition to our little Cleobury coteries? Poor Swinely, you know, was hardly admissible among us, when ladies were present!"

"Oh!" laughed Monica; "I remember seeing Mr. Swinely once when I came home for the holidays; he was so tipsy; he sat

down upon my kitten, and fell over my work-table, when I begged him to get up. Has your new assistant got a red face, like Mr. Swinely's, Dr. Crofton?"

"I cannot answer that question, Monica, because I have never seen the gentleman. But he *is* a gentleman, Major. My old friend, Sir James Phillips, assures me of that. He is of an old Somersetshire family, that has suffered some reverses lately through the failure of a bank—Gilroyd and Westall—I think."

"Ah! I know Gilroyd and Westall; they failed two years ago. An awful crash it was; the ruin of many families. What is your young friend's name, Crofton?"

"Wentworth—Roland Wentworth. Sir James speaks very highly of him, and says he looks on him almost as a son."

"Then, why could he not help him forward in his profession in town, instead of sending him to this out-of-the-world place?"

"Well, Sir James has sons and nephews

of his own in the profession, whom he will naturally assist before a stranger in blood; and the young man himself prefers a country practice. Then there will be a good opening for him, you know, Major, when I retire; and I believe, from what I hear, that he has some little private fortune of his own."

"But we cannot hear of your retiring yet, Crofton; we cannot afford to lose you; and you must bring Mr. Wentworth here, when you have a quiet evening, for a game at chess with me, and a song or two from my Money. Why, you are not going already?"

"I expect Mr. Wentworth will have arrived before I can get back, Major; the train was due at Lingford an hour ago."

"Don't forget all the fine promises you have made me, Dr. Crofton!" laughed little Monica. "I shall claim them all; balls, concerts, and the rest of it. By the way, is Mr. Wentworth married?"

"No, Monica, he is unmarried; and

therefore, he is fair game for the belles of Cleobury. But oh! Monica, as you are strong, be merciful!"

She laughed saucily; and tossed back her curls, with a pretty gesture, half petulant, half careless, then looked down demurely, and did not withdraw her hand from my lingering farewell pressure. Ah, well, I may be excused from thinking myself elderly, while the girls show no consciousness of such a fact!

CHAPTER IV.

MY ASSISTANT.

"Now give us men from the sunless plain
Made strong and brave by familiar pain,
By the need of work in the snows and the rain."

MRS. BROWNING.

My house door was on the latch, when I returned home—a primitive fashion it was at Cleobury—and my first intimation that my new Assistant had arrived, was the presence of a great box in the lobby, over which I stumbled in the darkness and nearly broke my shins, an opportunity for testing Mr. Wentworth's surgical skill, which I was thankful to have escaped, however narrowly. I turned back and rang the door bell, and then went to the

parlour; all was silence and darkness, save for a faint glimmer of firelight, struggling through a recent burden of coals. I fancied I heard a slight movement in the room although I could discern no one. "Hallo! any one here? Mr. Wentworth?—Mrs. Pritchard?" No reply. I walked to the fireplace and stirred up a broad blaze that lighted up all the room, but recoiled with a start that nearly precipitated me into the grate on perceiving,—seated in my easy chair, within a yard of my person — a great, white, truculent looking bull-dog. Now I hate and abhor dogs of every species and variety; I dislike their habits; I have no sympathy with their tastes; I dread their tendency to hydrophobia; and a bull terrier is in my opinion the most objectionable, and altogether reprehensible form that a canine individual can assume; and here I was, alone—almost in darkness—with a strange brute of that description sitting cheek by jowl with me,

in my own easy chair. Silently I stared at the bull dog, silently he stared back at me; his face seemed to wear a sardonic grin that said, as plainly as phiz of dog could say :—

"I don't know you, I don't want to know you, but I see that you are afraid of me, and if you stir a finger I'll give you cause."

Yes, that is what he must have meant, sitting there stern and motionless as a marble hound. His prominent eyes goggling menacingly at me, his black lips curling up from his white fangs—or his nose was it that turned up? yes, he was certainly turning up his nose at me. His ears—what was left of them—pricked up aggressively like horns; I never saw a more hideous beast. If I move he'll be at my throat, I know he will! I have heard that the human eye can awe any animal, but the harder I stare at him, the more he sneers at me. I'll try the human voice—"Here, Cæsar, Pompey; that's what they call the things —Nero, (he looks more like *Agripper!*)

good dog!" He lolls out his red tongue at me; does he mean it for impertinence? My teeth chattered with terror; I hoped he wouldn't take it for a challenge. "Good dog!" I falter forth again; he rises, he shakes himself, we are *both* shaking now! I move my hand to the bell-rope, very cautiously; just as I touch it the beast springs suddenly from the chair, and in my terror I ring a peal that, if it had sounded after midnight, might have served for the alarum of half the parish *in articulo mortis.* Mrs. Pritchard rushes hastily into the room and tumbles over the dog, which, annoyed by my abrupt movement, was as hastily leaving it.

"Bother the dog!" says she.

"Amen," I piously rejoined. "Why did you not answer the bell when I came in, you old sinner?"

"I couldn't answer no quicker, Dr. Guy, the articulation be so bad in my knee joint."

"Where's Mr. Wentworth?"

"He's gone to his room. I was just getting him a bit of supper, and that dog was waiting for him—he don't bite—leastways not often, Mr. Wentworth says."

"All right, bring in the lamp." And I was left alone again with my enemy. Well, at least Swinely never brought a bull-dog into my house with, for all I know, the bull belonging to it. There he is up stairs, (the man I mean,) I hear him tramping overhead, I wish he'd come down and deliver me from this canine oppression. That brute looks longingly at my leg; once he takes hold of it I suppose we shall have to cut it off to get free from him. That would be an operation in which I should take too painful an interest. Ah! here he comes.

"Welcome to Cleobury, Mr. Wentworth. I am sorry I was not at home to receive you, but I have been punished for my remissness; your dog has nearly scared me to death."

"I trust she has not so far mistaken her rightful position, as to take *you* for the intruder, Dr. Crofton?" answered the young man, in a voice whose accent and modulation at once convinced me that I had not overrated his claim to the title of gentleman.

"I do not know what her rightful position may be," I rejoined, laughing. "I should be inclined to dispute that it was where I found her, in my easy chair; but from her look, I should say, it would not be very safe to dispute with her at all."

"Oh, she is very gentle, come here, Vixen, is she not very handsome, Dr. Crofton?"

"She is ugly enough to be considered so by good judges, I suppose, but I care nothing for such beasts of prey. I am only interested in animals which are good to eat, and such brutes as yours, cannot even catch any but cats, which are never eaten—in this country. Here comes Mrs. Pritchard with

the lamp and your supper, you must be fed before we can have any conversation, I am sure you must be famished."

The stranger seemed in no degree averse to profit by my hospitality, and while he was occupied in discussing the viands that Mrs. Pritchard set before him, I drew my chair a little into the shadow, and scrutinised him as he sat beneath the full light of the 'moderator.' A fine young man, certainly, a very fine young man; slightly above the common height, say five feet eleven, with a frame powerfully built—rather for strength than for elegance—although not without the grace that necessarily results from perfect harmony of proportion. I do not think that the ladies would call him handsome though. His head was well formed and well set on, there was intellect on his wide forehead, shaded by crisp curls of dark brown hair, but there was a thoughtful gravity in his grey eyes, set deep beneath overhanging brows, and

a resolved energy of will and purpose in the curves of his lips and chin, that I fancy will scarcely be very attractive to women, who like more sensibility in a masculine countenance. Yet it was a fine face, though too grave, too inflexible, for so young a man as I knew him to be; Sir James had told me his age was twenty-six, or I should have taken him to be some years older.

He was fashionably, though plainly dressed, and his every attitude had the ease and self-possession of a man whose good breeding is no less the result of natural refinement than of culture.

When he had finished his supper, to the accompaninent of such desultory conversation as passes between a newly arrived traveller and his host, I rang the bell for the materials for a certain stimulating compound, which had had, alas! but too irresistible a fascination for my late Assistant Swinely,—and invited my young guest to draw near the fire, and make himself com-

fortable. I even offered him a cigar,—though I hate tobacco myself. But he declined the indulgence, and his refusal went far to atone for the presence of the noxious animal he had brought with him. Then spake he.

"From what my fellow-passengers told me, Dr. Crofton, your parishes about here are not very thickly populated, and the bridle roads are rough and wild; there must be some hard-riding, to visit your sick, sometimes?"

"Why, yes. I wear out a good many horse-shoes—and a few horses occasionally—but our roads are less trying for the horses, than for their riders. No use in my asking, are you a good horseman, Wentworth? all young fellows answer 'yes' to that question?"

"I have not been riding much for the last two years, but I am country bred, you know, and so of course I was formerly at home in the saddle."

"Do you like hunting? this is scarcely

a good hunting country, but we have a pack of hounds in the neighbourhood."

"That, I should think, is an amusement for which I shall have little leisure; indeed lately I have had little leisure for amusements of any kind."

"Perhaps not, while you were studying, but now you can afford more time for the recreations so natural at your age. 'All work and no play,'—you know? I need scarcely ask, if your choice of a profession was voluntary?"

The grave face lighted up with a still glow, the grey eyes flashed.

"I chose it with my whole heart. I have no other wish, no other aim in life, than to pursue it worthily, as the noblest work by which man can be served and God honoured."

"I fear you will find that the world in general does not so highly estimate our work, certainly does not highly reward it. I do not wish to discourage you, but, be

you never so successful in the healing art, you must not look for much appreciation of your labours, even from those who the most profit by them. Patients are ungrateful and exacting in proportion to their ignorance of the self-sacrifice required of us. A country doctor can be no Sybarite, I promise you."

The young man glanced keenly round the room, which I had spent some time and thought in making as luxurious and comfortable as possible, and then his eyes rested a moment on my face, and a faint smile flitted over his, as if he saw some incongruity between my appearance and surroundings, and my talk about self-sacrifice. Ah, young people are such enthusiasts!—then rising from his seat, he began slowly to pace the room, while Vixen, seeming to think that the exercise was 'constitutional', followed at his heels. Presently he spoke in a lower voice, more to himself than to me, as some men do when they have lived much alone.

"I am young," he said, "I am strong; in the presence of the countless forms of human agony, how less than trifling should seem the surrender of personal well-being to aid in relieving it—how childish the complaint of individual loss or wrong! To serve in such a field of labour should be its noblest recompense and crown of reward!"

"My good fellow, such enthusiasm is natural and becoming at your age. We have all had such dreams and aspirations in our day—we have most of us sighed to be poets, apostles, even martyrs, to our ideals of beauty and truth; but as the morning light increases, the rose tints of our dawn take a more uniform shade, or if bright clouds still linger, we know they *are* clouds, far above the level of our working life, and not visioned angels, beckoning us to a sphere above and beyond it. In plainer prose, we still try to do our duty in our profession; but we are apt to grow more interested in the dinner-bell than in the

night-bell; and although still glad to relieve human suffering, we think a little less of the patient, and a little more of the fee. Come, sit down again and tell me, if you don't hunt what *do* you do? I must find what will tempt you, in the way of amusement. A young man must have *some*."

Again that pleasant smile lit up the serious features.

"Is not that sentiment from a commanding officer to his subaltern, a little subversive of strict discipline, Doctor?"

"Oh, bother strict discipline! there is no question between us of commanding officer or subalterns; let us understand our mutual relations at once. My late assistant, Tom Swinely, was a very clever fellow in his way, and was for many years very useful to me, in taking all the drudgery and hard work that falls to the share of an assistant surgeon."

"And that I," interposed my compan-

ion, "am fully prepared, and I hope, competent to take."

"Exactly. You will have your share, never fear; you are young enough to be the better for it, for some years to come. But poor Swinely was fit for nothing else, and soon grew unfit for that. He was a vulgar, drunken dog, who could not be admitted to the houses of the better class of my patients, and lately became intolerable even to me. Now I am independent of my practice, and being fond of my ease—a little self-indulgent, in fact—I do not care for work, for work's sake, as you younger fellows do. Still I have had some years' practice among people in whom I have the interest, not only of a medical attendant, but of an old friend and associate; and Dr. Watson, the oldest surgeon in the neighbourhood after me, is as ignorant and wooden-headed a fellow as ever physicked a patient to death; and yet if I retire he is sure to succeed to all my practice, because he has a large family and

does not get drunk. So I asked Sir James Phillips to look out for me and find me an assistant, whose intelligence and ability, and gentlemanly manners, might fit him not only to assist me in my present labours, but to succeed me in them, if I choose to vacate the field. And as I am something of a physiognomist, I think I may congratulate myself on his selection."

The young man bent his head in acknowledgment of the compliment, but kept his eyes fixed on me as if waiting what was to follow.

"So, Wentworth, you see it is not a mere drudge I look for in you, but a fellow-worker on equal terms, a friend and companion for myself, and for the circle to which my name will be your introduction. A partner and successor—I hope."

And I rose and laid my hand impressively on his shoulder; an action, by the way, which I could hardly have performed with grace, if he had been standing upright. He answered quietly :—

"Dr. Crofton, I thank you for your confidence in me, I hope by my conduct to justify it."

I resumed :—"So far as work goes, I shall take the authority to which my experience entitles me, and there of course, you must consent to remain my subaltern; but in our social moments we will abolish such distinctions. You will find me neither a prig nor a bully. I am nearly double your age (I would not confess it if I could help, but when a man has lived twenty-five years in one place, the years he has reckoned are as well known to every body as the figures on the dial of the church clock). But I have not come to old-fogeyism yet, I can laugh with the lads—aye, and the pretty girls, too; and there is no reason why you and I should not be as good company as if I were your elder brother."

"I fear you will not find me very good company," replied Wentworth, "indeed, Dr. Crofton, in buoyancy of temperament

and enjoyment of life's sunny side, it strikes me that you are much the younger of the two."

"You have had recent troubles, my good friend, you have not yet surmounted their depressive effect, we will see you bright enough soon. I will take you to-morrow to see a young girl whose merry dimples will make sunshine for you at once."

"I don't care for young girls!"

A sentiment like this, so utterly heterodox, on lips where the beard was yet downy, chilled me to the blood. I became suddenly grave.

"I do not like to hear you say that. A young man of twenty-five *ought* to like young girls. I hope you are not of those for whom no pleasure has any charm, unless it has the flavour of vice in it? I have no sympathy with such tastes. A woman—be she lovely as the Paphian goddess herself—must be pure in heart and life, or she is unsexed to me."

"Quite so," answered Wentworth, still rather apathetically, "but I think I prefer the society of *old* women, especially of old maids."

"I don't sympathise with *that* taste either," laughed I; "however, if it lies in that direction, I can recommend Miss Barham, a very sensible, amiable woman, as a great deal safer for platonics, than my little Monica, whose blue eyes would have danger in them for such dreams, even for such a philosopher as you."

"Is Miss Monica the Queen of Beauty at Cleobury?"

"She has but lately commenced her reign, but it threatens to be an absolute one; she has nearly vanquished *me* I can tell you."

"You were generous then, in proposing to add me to your list of rivals."

"Ah, you think I should have no chance with you? that you would walk over the course, if only my name was entered? Not

at all, my good boy, you young chaps lose your advantages through want of skill in employing them. I often watch your blunders, and think of the French saying :— '*Ah, si la jeunesse savait !*' "

"But the rest of the quotation, Doctor ?"

"You are laughing at me, you sly dog, are you ? Well, I have not come up with the rest yet. But if you think of marrying—"

"Ah, I have no hope of marrying, unless I can pick up an heiress," he smiled.

"No ? yet Sir James told me that your private fortune rendered you tolerably independent of your profession, unremunerative as you will find it for some time yet."

"Sir James was mistaken. I have no private means at present available."

"You are hampered with debts, perhaps, at usurious interest ?"

"No, Dr. Crofton, I have never in my life owed a shilling beyond my power to pay."

"That's right—then you are waiting for dead men's shoes? for an inheritance that has been promised you?"

An expression of pain passed over Wentworth's forehead, and he shook his head. My curiosity was growing intense to know more about his history, but courtesy forbade my pressing him farther on a subject that seemed distasteful to him, so I changed the conversation to the dog.

"Have you had that beast long, Wentworth?"

"Two years."

"And you take her about with you everywhere? not to the bedsides of your patients, I hope?"

"No," he answered, smiling. "Vixen's privileges do not extend so far; but she is a great favourite, perhaps because she has cost me so dear."

The dog, hearing her name, crept forth, and put her paws upon his knee, while he fondled her crop-eared head, and gazed into

her goggle eyes as he might have done into his mistress's.

"She has cost you much, has she? I have known men who had not a shilling to spare for their laundress, throw away pounds on a brute like that. How much did you give for her?"

"Give? Oh, she was a present to me."

"You said she cost you dear?"

"She cost me," he said slowly; "she cost me the heart of the woman I loved!"

Up went my ears in a minute, so Vixen's might have done if she had had any.

"The devil she did? tell me all about that—I have a lively interest in love affairs—all my friends tell me theirs; it is not that I am inquisitive, quite the reverse, but you know the old proverb, 'Tell me your company, and I'll tell you who you are.' My version of it is, 'Tell me your love affairs, and I'll tell you what you are.'"

"But, Dr. Crofton," said my Assistant, laughing, "what if I do not feel inclined

to furnish you with that key to my character?"

"Oh, but you will; why lose time in beating about the bush for a confidence that you are sure to give me sooner or later?"

"It will be later then, Doctor," rejoined the impracticable youth, with his pleasant laugh; "for it is late enough now to go to bed, if you will allow me, I will bid you good-night."

And off he stalked, and I mixed myself a last glass, and sat down again to ruminate. In our by-way of a village, we are slow to feel the world's gyrations. As yet we retain our usages long, and look with surprise, if not suspicion, on any evidence of the changes that are whirling on without our charmed circle. I wonder what that circle will think of the specimen of young England to whom I am about to entrust its physical well-being? A fellow whose whiskers might do duty for a moderate sized beard, and whose moustache matches his

whiskers? A fellow who has abjured the close-shaven chin and irreproachable white tie of the profession, to which *I* still cling, who walks off to bed in that cavalier fashion, and who carries about a bull dog as a love-token?

CHAPTER V.

MORE OF OUR NEIGHBOURS.

When Roland Wentworth joined me at breakfast next morning, the favourable impression he had made on me the previous night was confirmed and strengthened. His manner, freed from the slight constraint of a first introduction, had the ease and grace of a man more accustomed to good society than are the great majority of young medical students. The somewhat worn and melancholy look had passed from his face, which, though still wearing its expression of firmness and resolution, was yet brighter and more cheerful, and there was an alertness in his step and gesture, as

of a man who has a work and purpose before him, which he finds neither difficult nor distasteful.

"You look like a giant refreshed," was my greeting to him, "you were too much the knight of the Rueful Countenance last night, it is wonderful what a cure it is for troubles, to sleep upon them."

"The troubles are seldom incurable that can be slept upon, Dr. Crofton."

"Ah, you'll tell me all about yours soon, I daresay there is some little romance mixed up with it. I am not curious—not a bit—but I am in the confidence of all Cleobury, and soon I shall be in yours."

"So you shall, Doctor; but at present I am thinking of what is better for trouble than sympathy, and that is hard work."

"You look as if you meant work, too; but you must restrain your activities a little, for Cleobury is in no need of her medical staff at present. I never knew her so healthy. One or two rheumatic cases,

chiefly chronic, at Deerbrook; one in pneumonia at Adforton; but he is recovering; two or three children in hooping-cough—why, our youngest baby is three weeks, and the next is not expected for a fortnight."

"It seems I am unfortunate," said Wentworth, laughing, "but what are your plans for me for to-day?"

"Suppose we go and look in at the Cedars or at the Rectory? you may as well make acquaintance with your new neighbours."

"No," answered the youth, with just a shade of imperiousness, "our poorer neighbours have the first claim; you shall show me the way to these Deerbrook cottages, with their suffering inmates, first."

"Subaltern, indeed," thought I to myself, "pretty subaltern, who thus early takes on himself to cut out the day's work for me. However, I am naturally easy-going, and have no objection to giving up the reins of government to one who can be

trusted to drive. He shall have all the night work to himself, though."

He seemed to read my thoughts, with those piercing, serious, grey eyes, for he added, half jestingly, half apologetically:

"You see, Dr. Crofton, I can hardly get along till I have learned something of the 'locale' here; and your friends, I am sure, will thank me more for enabling you to bestow your leisure upon them, than for giving them my own."

"All right, we will beat the bounds together, and have some professional talk by the way." But we had scarcely finished breakfast, when a stylish-looking trap bowled up to the door, in which sat a rather fashionably-dressed man of about thirty-three, tall and fair, with marked features, light hair, and whiskers that streamed out from his face like the "banners of the Northern Lights." He descended hastily, flung the reins of his showy chestnut to his groom, and entered my parlour unannounced.

"Just in time, I see, Doctor!" he cried, in a cheerful, manly voice, "I thought I'd catch you before you were out on your run. I want you to look in at Heath Hill this morning. Mrs. Green tells me that Charlie was very feverish last night; it's nothing, I daresay," said the father, looking wistfully at me, "but the poor little chap has no mother to look after him, you see, and that makes me more troublesome to you than perhaps you think I need be."

"You would not need to trouble me much, Sir Charles, if you would but attend to my directions. You will persist in drugging that boy with wine and beer—no wonder he is feverish. I will be at Heath Hill in half-an-hour, with my coadjutor here—Mr. Wentworth—Sir Charles Cotgrave."

Sir Charles shook hands frankly and kindly with the stranger.

"When did you arrive, Mr. Wentworth?"

"Only last night."

"So lately? I am happy to be the first to welcome you to Cleobury; we must try and make it pleasant to you. Dr. Guy, you don't think there is much the matter with my boy?"

"The boy will be right enough if you leave off poisoning him with things that are unfit for such a child."

"He has not had a glass of wine these three days; if anything has hurt him, it is the damp from the river. That fool Frank Temple kept him loitering by the river-side yesterday afternoon till nearly dusk, while he was philandering with Miss Graysbrooke."

"Oh, nonsense, Sir Charles — Monica would not be so imprudent as *that*—her father would not allow it."

"Oh, of course it was all proper. Her father was fishing, and Monica was watching him, and Frank was accidentally walking in that direction—and equally, of course,

he would have been walking there still if he could have kept her with him—and there was Charlie, puddling in the weir with a crooked pin—catching cold instead of fish; and the stupid old Major, seeing nothing but his rod—"

"They would all have been the better for the rod, I fancy. What a goose Temple is to think that a girl like Monica would have anything to say to him!"

"He's awfully spooney upon her, and she makes game of him, as we all do; but I think we've had pretty near enough of the joke now. I have been in a devil of a passion with him, and said more than I quite meant—but it is forgiven and forgotten now. Well, by-bye—I'll meet you at Heath Hill in an hour. I am off to the Rectory. I have a message from Lady Janet to Miss Barham—*au revoir*, Mr. Wentworth."

"That seems a good fellow," observed Wentworth, as the Baronet drove off.

"He is a very good fellow; I can speak confidently on that head, for I have known him since he was a boy at school. He is generous and kindly to a fault, but too easily influenced—not from any kind of natural sagacity, but from mere indolence, and carelessness of self-assertion. If he does not marry again soon, that boy of his will suffer, for he needs more authority over him than Sir Charles will care to exercise."

"Then Lady Janet is not his wife?"

"No, Lady Janet Forrester is his mother-in-law. She was the daughter of an Irish peer, whose title lapsed at his death. She married a Colonel Forrester, who took her out with him to Madras. The marriage proved an unhappy one; Lady Janet returned to England with her infant daughter, and never saw her husband again. She lived in strict seclusion—which some of the good-natured world were not slow to insinuate was not entirely voluntary. Her blackguard husband did all in his power to

countenance such a report, but those who were acquainted with his mode of life in India gave no credence to it. However a woman—and a man too, for that matter—can live *down* much—and live *past* more. When Lady Janet rose to the surface of society again, her chief reputation—be it good or bad—was that of being very anxious to get her portionless daughter well married. How she managed it, I do not know, for Miss Forrester had no great attractions of any kind, but she caught Sir Charles at Leamington, and they were married in two months; and she died in her confinement, two years later."

"And does Lady Janet live at Heath Hill?"

"No, she has a small house at Scarborough, where she lives in the summer, and spends most of the winter with her son-in-law. The world of rank neglects her, because she has no hold on it through surviving family interest; the world of

fashion ignores her because she is aged and poor. But Lady Janet consoles herself with the deference accorded to her by our country magnates, and by holding, when she is among them, a kind of mimic state, which sets all our matrons quarrelling for six months after on questions of precedence, while she looks down upon them all as immeasurably and equally her inferiors."

"What an alarming old lady! is she at Heath Hill now?"

"No, but you need not be afraid of her; (you don't look very timid). As my friend, you will be graciously received, for I am a great pet of Lady Janet's. I dissuaded Sir Charles from the journey to London, which was fatal to poor Lady Cotgrave; and her mother always says that if she had listened to my advice, she would have been living still."

"Sir Charles was taking a message from Lady Janet to Miss Barham—I think you

mentioned that name last night?—a literary lady, I think you said she was?"

"I never did, for I am no judge of her claims to such a title; I know little of the current literature of the day, and I never talked to Annie about any writers but Byron or Moore."

And with one of those sudden leaps in which memory sometimes indulges—even as I spoke I went back to the long-ago days when I was Annie's lover, and I used to recite to her "Farewell, if ever fondest prayer," &c. That was before I got to "the emerald meadows of Cashmere," where I have since so often been alternately pursuing and pursued—for so capricious is the flight of the "winged gems" that haunt those symbolical meadows, that "the young pursuer" is often bothered to know whether *he* is hunting *them* or *they* are hunting *him!*

My companion went on—

"Is she charitable, then?—a member of

ladies' committees, or an industrious contributor of pen-wipers and slippers to Curates and Bazaars ?"

"No."

"Does she retail scandal, then ?—or work altar-cloths—or blow up her servants—or pet lap-dogs—or physic the poor ?—in short, what is her peculiar line? Most maiden ladies have a peculiar line ; what does she proclaim as her special place and work in the world ?"

"I think she would hardly define it herself," I answered. "I doubt if anyone could define it for her. But I am sure that if she were away—although the poorest endowed and weakest would miss her the most—the strongest and most gifted would recognise a want they could not supply, and a vacancy they could not fill. The charm she throws around her in society is felt rather in the tact with which she elicits the accomplishments of others than in her skill in displaying her own. She rarely sparkles —she always shines. Only those who are

happy in her closest intimacy know that her mind is more than merely sympathetic and appreciative, when she delights them with a graceful vivacity that never startles, and a delicate wit, that never wounds."

"Dr. Crofton, you describe a perfect woman."

"Well—yes, perhaps;" I rejoined, rather doubtfully; for with all my esteem for Miss Barham, I had not of late years thought of her quite in that light. "Yes, in one sense, she is perfect; but then, it is a perfection that comes only with years and experience—perhaps even, with sorrow, (poor Annie)! We all wish our wives and mistresses to be one day as perfect; but we are in no hurry to welcome a perfection that comes with grey hairs and fading bloom."

"But why is she still unmarried?"

"She—I—" I murmured,—"a disappointment—and then she has led a retired life for some years, as governess—until lately, when the death of a relative has left her

independent. Wentworth—I'll make you a confidence. I sometimes think, that if, years hence, I am still unmated with a younger bride, I should not act unwisely in sharing my home with such a tender nurse and gentle companion as my old love, Annie Barham; if—" But here I stopped, for the young man's glance expressed, if not contempt, certainly disapproval. "You think me selfish? but remember Annie is no longer young. I must wait a little longer, before I seek in faded eyes the smile that still greets me in brighter ones."

"Will you not have waited too long, Doctor? Will not such a woman as you describe Miss Barham to be, have at least too much consciousness of her own worth, to accept a man who only takes her as a *pis aller?*"

"No—no. Annie loved me in past years; she is too faithful ever to change; I understand women so well! I never saw the one from whom Guy Crofton would fear a refusal. But here we are at Heath-hill."

CHAPTER VI.

SIR CHARLES'S SECRET.

HEATH-HILL was a long, low mansion of two storeys only, with a plain façade, from either side of which extended wings so disproportioned in their width to the main building, that the edifice always suggested to me the idea of an architectural albatross. It was built of grey stone, and sited—with the ingenious perversity our progenitors often displayed in such matters—in the hollow of a park planted with noble trees, and commanding magnificent views, in such a manner that the scenery was not to be seen, except from the attic windows; and the groups of trees in the distance were shut

out of view by two huge sycamores, whose branches swept the very windows of the living-rooms.

That was no trouble to Sir Charles. He hated cutting down trees, and was seldom within doors, while there was any daylight to look from the windows. At the back of the house, and close to it, lay the stables, which were the admiration of the whole country, and the pride of their owner's heart. And the kennels of the Lingford hounds, of which he had been for some years master, were just outside the oak coppice that skirted the park. If he could have built them in full view of the drawing-rooms, or opening out of them like a conservatory, he might have thought it worth while to sacrifice his sycamores; but that being unadvisable, he was content to let things remain as they were.

I drove Wentworth round to the back, and left my horse in charge of the servants there, while I walked round through the

garden. My long professional services had given me the privilege of intimacy in most of the families I visited; and I came and went, unannounced, whenever the hall-door was open. It was so in this case, and I led my companion across a low wide entrance hall, profusely decorated with stags' antlers, foxes' heads, and other such spoils of the chase, to a door opening into a long passage, at the end of which was an apartment supposed to be devoted to the studies of the heir-apparent of Heath-hill and Cleobury Manor, under the guidance of his tutor, Frank Temple.

From this door, there issued rather anomalous sounds; a voice, masculine in tone, but with more sweetness than power, was singing to a pianoforte accompaniment, a lack-a-daisical love ditty; but whenever it rose to high notes, there rose above it the piercing howl of a dog, instantly followed by a rapturous peal of sweet, childish laughter. Either the singer was indifferent

to this strange discord, or, what is more likely, he knew the uselessness of remonstrance; for he continued to warble his impassioned lay, until a prolonged yelp from the canine performer, seemed at length to exhaust his power of endurance.

"Charlie! I won't have that row. I'll turn that brute out of the room."

"No you won't; Mrs. Green says I'm ill, and papa says I'm never to be contradicted when I'm ill."

"Charlie, my dear boy," (in a coaxing voice) "let me put her out."

"No, I won't; why shouldn't she sing if she likes? I like her singing better than yours, and she don't make such ugly faces."

At this stage of the altercation I opened the door. My young friend, Temple, the musician, had risen from the music stool, and was gazing dejectedly at a beautiful boy of six years old, with a slight, active form, and long, golden ringlets falling over his shoulders, giving a seraphic, Raphaelite

air to the pretty head, which was scarcely in keeping with the arch *espièglerie* of his countenance.

He lay full length on the hearth-rug, with his arm round the neck of a spaniel setter, that had been uttering her inharmonious protest against poor Frank's execution of "My Life is Love for Thee."

The boy sprang to his feet as the door opened, with a joyous agility, that belied his pretensions to be an invalid, and bounding forward, jumped into my ready arms.

"So you are shamming sick, Charlie, you young scamp, you! I'll cure you; I've got a blister for you in my pocket, as big as a pancake; and here is a new doctor for you too (Mr. Wentworth, Mr. Temple), who will not give you nice physic in jam, as I do."

"He is only shamming, Dr. Crofton, is he?" enquired poor Frank, anxiously, "he is too full of his mischief to be really ill."

"There's not much the matter with him —a little heated, he has got a slight cold—

but you must be more prudent Frank, he might not have escaped so well."

The poor tutor looked abashed and penitent, but Charlie was a generous little fellow, and would not lay the blame of his own misdeeds on others.

"Now, Doctor," cried he, "don't you bully Frank. Papa has been down upon him like anything, and it's a shame, for it wasn't his fault at all. I wouldn't go home —he asked me to, lots of times—and then Monica tied her handkerchief round my throat, and said a minute or two more couldn't hurt—and Doctor, you may put your blister on your own head, and perhaps it will cure your hair of growing the wrong end upwards."

What wretches children are! I believe no eyes less sharp than such a little imp's could have detected that the locks which so well concealed a little thinness on the crown of my head, were carefully brushed from below. I tried to conceal my discom-

fiture by turning to converse with Temple, and Charlie directed his attention to the new doctor.

"You are the new doctor? What is your name? have you got nice jam physic?"

"What do you mean by that? physic is never nice."

"Oh, but mine is, or I wouldn't take it. Nice jam—so good—haven't you got any?"

"Ah! I see now! yes, I've got some, but I only give it to little girls, when they are feeble or foolish, never to big boys, like you, unless they are cowards and weaklings."

The child drew back, colouring deeply, and resentful tears shone in his blue eyes.

"I don't care! I won't take nasty physic! You're a ——"

But the epithet, probably not a very complimentary one, was arrested on his lips by the entrance of Sir Charles Cotgrave.

"Why, Squire!" I cried, "you have been

alarming yourself unnecessarily—your boy is all right; but, remember, he has a tendency to fever—if you give him a drop of wine, he will be ill in earnest."

"He shall not have a drop; I give you my word, Crofton—his grandmother will be here soon, and she is very strict in enforcing total abstinence on Charlie. Will Mr. Wentworth and you stop and lunch, and I'll take you to see the new kennels?"

"Not to-day, thanks, we have a long round to make this morning."

"You are from Somersetshire, Mr. Wentworth? I met a gentleman of your name, two years ago, at Lord Carew's at a shooting party. Wentworth of Hollingrove—poor fellow, I heard he came to grief shortly afterwards, through the failure of some Bank—he was, perhaps, a relation of yours?"

"He is my eldest and only brother, Sir Charles."

"Indeed! I hope, then, that the report

that reached me of his losses, was exaggerated?"

"It was scarcely possible to exaggerate it; he was utterly ruined, and barely able to save enough from the wreck of his fortune to take him, with his wife and children, to New Zealand, to begin life anew."

"And the family, I believe, was of old standing in the county. What a bore to lose a patrimony in such a way! Your brother's speculations must have been rash, to involve a large landed property to such an extent?"

"The property was not large, and had been somewhat heavily encumbered in my father's time. My brother's was the common fate of a man, ignorant of commercial details, who suffers himself to be deceived by the representations of a supposed friend, to involve himself in the responsibilities of a falling house, that only cares to defer the crisis."

"Dreadful rogues, some of those business

men — regular swindlers! And so your brother is in New Zealand? Not a bad move, that—I wonder you did not go with him, though we Cleobury people may congratulate ourselves that you did not."

Wentworth bowed slightly, in acknowledgment of the compliment, and murmured something like "I could not leave England—I have ties here that I cannot break."

What "ties" could he mean? I am not inquisitive—but those "ties" sound mysterious. Meantime, little Charlie had crept up to the strange "medico," and after peering wistfully into his face, in the vain effort to attract his attention, he climbed up the back of his chair, and putting his arm round his neck, said in a stage whisper, "Doctor, I'm not a squeakling, and I'll take the physic without the jam."

My Assistant turned—not sorry, I thought, for the interruption; and caressing the child's golden head, said kindly: "That's my

brave boy; but just now, Charlie, and I hope for some time yet, you shall have the jam without the physic."

"Crofton," said the Baronet, "will you and Mr. Wentworth dine with me on Wednesday? You know who you'll meet—Price, Laroque, and that set—our comrades of the Lingford hunt, Mr. Wentworth,—it will be our last bachelor spread this season; for when Lady Janet comes, it will be the ladies' reign, you know."

"One of us will come, Sir Charles. Wentworth shall join you, if I can't."

As we rose to take leave, Sir Charles drew me aside.

"Come with me into the billiard-room, I have a word to say to you."

I followed him without suspicion, thinking he was going to tell me something about the child. But when we reached the billiard-room, he began knocking the balls about in an aimless kind of way, while his eyes avoided mine. I watched him in si-

lence, and with some surprise, when at last he looked up and said :—

"Dr. Guy, I have a secret for you to keep for me!"

"It will be safe with me, whatever it is, Sir Charles."

"I am afraid I am in a scrape, Doctor."

My thoughts flew wildly to all sorts of conjectures, as to what scrape it could be. About money—or quarrelling—or women? Women of course, it proved to be.

"I am engaged to be married, Doctor."

"Well, Sir Charles, that is a scrape you have been in before, and I see no reason why you should dread it now. You do not expect condolence, do you?"

"I don't know—guess first who it is I am engaged to."

"Something depends on that, certainly; but how can I guess? Some lady in London, probably, whose name I have never heard—unless—not Aurelia Comberhill is it?"

"Aurelia Comberhill! come, no, not so bad as that. What do you say to the Major's little daughter, Monica Graysbrooke?"

"Monica!" a note of admiration, as big as a lamp-post, would faintly express the tone of astonishment in which I echoed the name.

"Ah!" resumed Cotgrave, dejectedly; "you don't wonder that I call *that* a scrape now, do you?"

"Indeed! I do wonder very much, that you should consider it a scrape to be accepted by as pretty, sweet, and innocent a little girl, as blooms in all England. But I wonder, too, how it came about, she is such a child; and how is it that no whisper of it has reached me before?"

"Look here, Crofton;" said Sir Charles, aiming quite wildly at three balls at once; "I'll tell you all about it. You know Charlie has been staying at Scarborough with his grandmother, this summer, and

Miss Graysbrooke was there too. She had only left school a few weeks. I was going back and forth to see Charlie, and upon my life—I can't tell how it happened—but I found myself popping the question, without intending it in the least, and she said, yes. And so—here we are!"

Not a very lucid account, certainly; but it was not so incoherent to me, as it would have been to any man who did not know Monica Graysbrooke. I could partly understand how a fellow like Cotgrave, a little shy of ladies' society, but the more accessible to their influence, when brought within its range, had quite lost his self-control, when suddenly subjected, all day and every day, to the countless fascinations, the ever-varying and bewitching *enfantillages* of such a creature as Monica; but I could not understand, why the sorcery that had captivated him had so soon lost its power. Why

"The lovely toy so fiercely sought
Had lost its charm by being caught."

"Well?" I repeated, interrogatively, "and so—there you are?"

"And I do not know for how long; that is partly why I call it a scrape, Doctor. Monica accepted me, it is true, but she pleaded her youth, her inexperience, and what not. She coaxed me so prettily, that before I knew what I was about, I pledged her my word that our engagement should be kept a secret as long as she chose, and that I would not press her to acknowledge it; that's what bothers me. I should not have minded, if I could have claimed her openly, and married her right off; but a solemn engagement hanging round a man's neck, with a girl who won't own him, is not the thing, is it?"

"It's mere girlish bashfulness, it cannot be a secret long, she will be as anxious to let the world know it as you can be, if you do not contradict or thwart her caprice. What does the Major say?"

"Oh, he is quite satisfied with me, as a

son-in-law, and agrees with me that it is childish to make a secret of the engagement; but he thinks Monica is certainly too young to be married yet, and by Jove, Crofton! so do I. I do not know what possessed me to propose to a slip of a girl just out of the school-room. I should have thought of Charlie, poor little beggar, I am afraid I have not chosen wisely a step-mother for him."

"As to that, boys are tolerably independent of step-mothers, and Monica is the sweetest-tempered little creature; — but what says Lady Janet?"

"She knows nothing of it, I was sworn to secresy, I told you."

"But you have broken your promise in Major Graysbrooke's favour, and in mine."

"Major Graysbrooke was, of course, excepted, and you, as my medical adviser, are my natural confidant in everything, Dr. Guy."

"You must make another exception in

favour of Lady Janet, and get her to set things on a right footing between the young lady and you."

"Oh, I know very well what my mother-in-law will say, she will tell me I have made a fool of myself, and so I think I have."

"It is too late to say that now, Cotgrave," I answered rather sharply, for I was vexed at his blindness to his own good fortune,—so easily won too! "since you have gained the dear girl's affections."

"But *have* I gained them, Dr. Guy? it does not look much like it, when she will not let me claim her, nor allow me the usual privileges of an affianced lover. I did think she cared for me, when I proposed for her, but I do not know what to think now."

"Why should she have accepted you, if she did not care for you, for of course she means to marry you in the end?"

"I never know what she means. She is

sometimes caressing, sometimes shy, so yielding one moment, so wilful and imperious the next. She plays with me as a nursery pet might play with a boy lover like Charlie, not as a girl treats the man who is to make her his wife."

To this, I had no reply. He described Monica as she was, as she always would be, the flitting, volatile grace that was so alluring in her, seemed to be the ground of his dissatisfaction, yet such as she was she had won him, and if, as he seemed to fear, she was indifferent to *her* good fortune, he, at least, was not enthusiastically grateful to the gods for *his !*

I could give him no better advice than to be patient and forbearing with his little love ; and promising, of course, inviolable secresy, I rejoined Wentworth, and drove pensively away, wondering at some men's good luck, and wondering too, if Sir Charles was the only one of the pair who repented of his precipitancy.

CHAPTER VII.

ROLAND SPILLS HIS WINE.

SIR CHARLES was called away to town, on the day before that fixed for his party, and it was postponed for a fortnight. On the day it came off, a man chose to get his arm crushed in a thrashing machine, (though, poor fellow, it was certainly *not* from choice) and I was called away to him, just as I was going to my room to dress, and Wentworth had to go without me, but with a promise that I would join the meeting before it broke up.

In the time that had elapsed since his first arrival, I had presented my young friend to most of the families I visited, and was pleased to find him a decided success.

Major Graysbrooke, a great authority on such matters, pronounced him to be a perfect gentleman, and gave him the *entrée* to the Cedars, whenever he might like to avail himself of it. By the way, it strikes me, that the silly old Major is a great deal more liberal of such invitations to young men, than he ought to be, with a pretty motherless daughter, whose engagement is still a close secret. It is all very well for *me* to come and go at my own sweet will; I am an old friend of the house; but with lads like Roland Wentworth, and Frank Temple, the case is very different. All the selfish old goose thinks of, is to secure a partner at whist, or an adversary for chess or backgammon, and forgets that Monica is not to these youths the child she seems in his dim, watery old eyes. And yet, if either of them presumed to ask her hand of him, what a red hot seething rage he would go into! For he does go into the most apoplectic rages, when his dignity is

offended, though he is as quick to forget offence as to resent it.

But to return to my Assistant. It was a comfort to find, that his professional ability was in no degree inferior to his social merits, and that I might safely entrust my patients to his care. He was a little touched, perhaps, by some of the new fangled heresies of modern science; but I was prepared for that, and he was not rash or self-conceited.

I am not jealous of him, nor afraid that my patients will like him better than Dr. Guy, they have known me too long for that; and notwithstanding caprice and fickleness, habit goes for a great deal in these matters. If all goes well, I shall give them up altogether to him soon, and they will not be able to call me a hireling shepherd, who sells his flock for their fleece. No, Roland will be no hireling shepherd either. I have already had opportunity of testing his surgical skill, and found his

touch light and accurate, his nerves as firm, as true as steel.

Gentle and tender as a woman by a sick bed, yet with resolution that never wavers, and authority that none dare dispute. Dogged and rebellious patients yield him a surly submission, the fretful and hysterical obey him with querulous docility, but the dim eyes of the aged and feeble brighten when they meet his smile, and languishing little children stretch out their wasted arms at his approach. He flings himself into his work, as if it were life itself to him, as if he had, nor could have, no hope nor interest beyond it.

Does this arise from a natural force of character and will, or have the currents of youthful impulse and emotion been turned aside by some disappointment or sorrow from their natural channels, to flow with concentrated volume in this ?

That I have yet to find out. His brother's ruin, and consequent exile, may explain much of the gravity, scarcely amount-

ing to sadness, which is unusual in so young a man—associating, too, with so lively a person as myself—but his quiet reserve repels me when I would invite his confidence to learn whether some grief or anxiety yet more personal is at the bottom of this strange seriousness of his. I wonder what "ties" are those he alluded to on his first visit to Heath Hill. Phillips told me that Roland's private fortune, some three or four hundred a year, had not been involved in the wreck of his brother's, but when I ventured an enquiry on the subject of ways and means, he answered that he had no "available" means beyond his professional income —what may that "available" mean? He spends part of every leisure evening in writing long letters; I happened once or twice to glance at the address of these, as he left them on the table for the post; they were always addressed to "Mrs. Hollys, Myrtle Lodge, Northwych." I don't like that constant correspondence with a mar-

ried woman—I know she is not a widow, once a letter was addressed "Rev. Henry Hollys, Myrtle Lodge." I hope, but I dare not ask, if the "ties" he spoke of are such as an honourable man may openly avow. I am by no means strait-laced, but I confess to an old-fashioned prejudice in favour of such women as our mothers and sisters should be. But it is unfair to condemn him unheard; for aught I know his money may have gone with his brother, and "Mrs. Hollys" may be his grandmother! As for little Monica, the impression she produced on him was very different from what I had expected, but I fancy there was a reason for that—Miss Graysbrooke was in one of her childish moods the day we called there, and took little or no notice of the handsome stranger—all her pretty playfulness was directed to *me*.

Yet she was so sweet with those blue eyes of hers glancing archly up at me from beneath their long fringes—her action was

so graceful as she knelt down beside me, to show me a little locket that her father had just clasped on her dimpled wrist, and the shy glance she turned on Roland contrasted so charmingly with the innocent *abandon* of her gaiety with me. I thought her enchanting, and expected that as soon as we left the house the young man would burst into transports of admiration. Not he! what do you think he said?

"A nice little girl, that, of the roly-poly pattern, a *beauté de diable* that quickly fades."

"No matter, we shall fade first—is she not bewitching as a kitten?"

"Yes, she has a great deal of the kitten about her—one feels in her presence what a kitten's graceful antics may mean to the mouse that is her destined prey. Miss Monica is a coquette of the first water, Dr. Crofton."

"Monica a coquette! ridiculous! an innocent little thing like that—a mere baby."

"*You* are the most innocent of the two in this case, Doctor."

"Roland Wentworth, if you dare insinuate a breath against the spotless purity of that angel, I'll knock you down."

He only laughed at me. "Don't be so aggressive, Dr. Crofton, I am incapable of insinuating anything against the purity of any young girl—I only meant that Miss Graysbrooke is more self-conscious than you believe her to be—just a little less artless in her wiles to attract admiration."

"Did she practise any wiles to attract *your* admiration, I should like to know?"

He laughed again. "Nay, I am scarcely such a coxcomb as to insinuate *that!*"

"I am glad of that at any rate—I see how the land lies—

> "'If she be not fair for me,
> What care I how fair she be?'"

Aha! Mr. Roland Wentworth?"

I left my wounded patient as comfortable as circumstances would permit, and managed

to arrive at Heath Hill just as the servants had quitted the room, and the gentlemen were growing genial and jolly over their dessert and wine. Sir Charles was talking to Laroque, an old fellow with a vigilant face and spiteful black eyes, and long white whiskers, that gave him the air of a marmoset monkey. Roland Wentworth, with little Charlie on his knee, was listening with apparent interest to an animated discussion between two of our local Nimrods, on some point of dispute that had arisen in a late steeple-chase. Frank Temple was there, with two or three more gentlemen of the neighbourhood, and some friends of Sir Charles, visitors from town, and Jack Buckland, the son of an old tenant of the Baronet's—a forward, vulgar fellow—whom Sir Charles was too lazy and good-natured to keep in his proper place.

"Well, Cotgrave," I observed, looking round the room, when, the first welcome over, I had taken the seat he offered me,

next him—"how is it that such a staunch churchman as you have no representative of the clergy here to-night? Although our rector has gone over to Rome with his invalid spouse, I quite expected to see his curate, Mr. Gabriel Hartopp, among you."

"And so you would, Doctor, but Mrs. Gabriel positively refused him permission to join us—she told me parsons had no business at naughty bachelor's dinners, and that darling Gaby never went anywhere without her."

"You should have invited the lady as well," laughed one of the 'convives.'

"Heaven forbid," cried I.

"And so I should, Melville, only from consideration for Crofton—she is his *bête noire*—the only woman, I do believe, whom he cordially dislikes."

"Crofton," said Mr. Wilmot Price, "I have not seen you since you came into your fortune—three thousand a year, clear, I am told."

"Something more or less, Price; some deductions for exaggerations, you know, and some for the lawyers."

"It is said, you have given your tenants at Rosebank notice to quit, and that you are going to retire from practice, take a wife, and live there yourself."

"To which of our country belles will you throw the handkerchief, Doctor?" said old Laroque, laughing, "you have been courting three generations of them, in my experience."

"Which of them will throw the handkerchief to me, Mr. Laroque? that must decide it. I will choose the girl who chooses me, that is my principle of natural selection."

"But, Doctor," cried Buckland, "your name is down on the running list for two or three already—there's Miss Barham, who they say you have been sweet upon these twenty years; there's the pretty heiress, just fresh from school—"

"Come, come, Master Jack, I rise to

order ; joke with me as freely as you will, but remember, no lady's name shall be jested with, in my hearing."

"Bravo, Dr. Guy," said our host, "you are a gentleman after all."

(What did he mean by his "after all" I wonder ?)

"A propos of ladies," said Captain Dalgleish, one of Sir Charles's London friends, "who was that beautiful girl I saw you handing out of a carriage at Scarborough last August, Crofton ? such a splendid woman, if she was not a duchess, she deserved to be one."

"If beauty conferred rank, Dalgleish, she would be an empress ; but, as it happens, she is only a young lady who lives with Lady Janet Forrester as companion ; she was shopping, the day you saw her, for my mother-in-law."

"And so she is only a servant ? I never was so taken in my life. I thought she was an Hon. at the very least."

"And that is the lowest to which you would condescend? But she is a very fine girl, certainly. By the way, Crofton, keep a vacant place in your heart, till you have seen her; who knows but that she may be the destined Queen of Rosebank? she is coming next week with Lady Janet."

"I have seen her, Sir Charles—her picture at least, in Miss Graysbrooke's album; she has secured a place in my heart already. Miss—Miss—I forget if Miss Monica told me her name?"

"Miss Rosamond Gilroyd—hallo! hold hard, Wentworth, that's the last bottle of my best claret that you have emptied in libation upon Charlie's head."

For the crystal jug had slipped from Roland's hand, and its contents streamed over the head and shoulders of the child, who nestled on his knee.

"A thousand pardons," he said, as he bent down to wipe the costly shower from the laughing boy's dripping curls.

"Mr. Wentworth, considering you have so peremptorily forbidden me to give Charlie one drop of wine, you might have been less lavish in your own prescription —never mind, he'll be none the worse for it, as it is. Mr. Temple, ring the bell for Mrs. Greene to take him to bed, will you? and tell Hall to bring in some more wine."

"Gilroyd," said Wilmot Price, "was not that the name of the banker fellow who swindled such a lot of people, a year or two ago, and poisoned himself with strychnine, when the crash came? Is this girl you have been speaking of a daughter of his? He was a very handsome fellow, I met him at dinner once at Wooffuton, before he bought that place in Somersetshire, where he died; where did Lady Janet pick up her companion?"

"I cannot tell you," replied our host, glancing uneasily at Wentworth, as if fearful that the association connected with

the name of the fraudulent banker would not be very pleasant to his guest; but Roland was not listening, Charlie was holding his face between his little hands, to compel his attention to an interesting narrative of a ride he had had upon Jack Buckland's "Roarer," as Charlie persisted in calling the showy mare "Aurora Floyd," to the disgust of her owner and the amusement of his friends, who always maintained that the boy's pronunciation of her name was significant of her habits. Presently the child's nurse appeared and bore him off to bed, and shortly afterwards Wentworth took his departure, pleading his promise to call on a sick woman before midnight. Two hours later I followed him home, and found him sitting by the fire in the parlour, leaning his head on his hands, and gazing abstractedly into the dying embers. He looked round when I came in, and I thought he wore an almost stern expression of resolute self-mastery.

"Are you home already?" he enquired, in a tone of surprise, then glancing at the time-piece—"I had no idea it was so late; I have been mooning here and let the fire out. Good-night, Dr. Crofton."

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS BARHAM COMPROMISED.

THE *dolce far niente* was over for me; the week following Sir Charles' dinner-party Cleobury fell sick. Scarlatina made its appearance among the little ones, and I now felt the full value of an active and efficient coadjutor, during the incessant calls made on my time night and day, by anxious mothers. Roland proved fully equal to the occasion, and became in consequence immensely popular with the matrons, to whom his fiat was as authoritative in the most unruly nursery, as it had been in the sick chamber of older patients. I was content to have it so. I was willing even to share my popularity with him, so that he always

rose to the night bell. And he did that always readily; he seemed quite to like its confounded tinkle! The visitation, however, was brief; such infectious disorders generally are brief in our healthy district; skilful treatment, I flatter myself, counts for something here. So one morning I found leisure to go up to the rectory to see my old flame, the Rector's sister, Annie Barham, and I found her in very close and confidential *tête-à-tête* with young Frank Temple. Miss Barham, though an old maid, was scarcely yet an old woman; she was some years younger than I, but she made no pretension to youthfulness in dress or manner. Her figure was yet slim enough, her complexion fair and smooth enough, to support such pretensions, if she had made them; but the lady-like simplicity of her attire, the quiet dignity of her manner, at once avowed her forty summers *bien sonnés*. Her fair hair was closely braided under a pretty lace cap, her dress, always of rich

material—for Annie was no longer poor—was almost quaker-like in its severe simplicity of fashion, with none of that wampum and jingle 'um that gives to our beauties of the present day the air of over-dressed Indian squaws, glittering with bugles and glass beads. As she rose to greet me her welcome was as ever, cordial and unaffected, but there was a slight shade of anxiety on her calm forehead and in her thoughtful eyes, that was not certainly shared by her companion. Frank looked positively radiant! I perceived at once that there was "something up," and my interest—I cannot call it curiosity—was excited.

"I am interrupting a confidence I see, Annie and Frank; if it concerns either of you, I claim the privilege of old friendship to share it."

Miss Barham turned a wistful look on Temple, who answered eagerly :—

"I am sure of your sympathy, Dr. Guy, I am sure you will rejoice with me. Oh,

Dr. Crofton, I am so happy; I hope, I believe, that she loves me!"

"The deuce she does? and who may 'she' be, pray?"

"Who could it be but the one idol of my life, my sweetest, blessed Monica?"

I was too taken aback at this confident declaration to make any reply, I stood staring at him in bewildered silence, but Miss Barham interposed gently:—

"You are too sanguine, my dear Frank; Monica is very young, very thoughtless; she does not understand the encouragement you derive from looks and words, to which she attaches no significance."

"No significance? Miss Barham, when her eyes droop beneath my gaze and rise again with such a sweet bashfulness to meet it? when her little hand returns, ever so lightly, the fond pressure of mine? when she wears the flowers I like, and sings the songs I praise, what significance can there be in this but—love?"

"The devil! (I beg pardon) that is precisely the question that I have sometimes been tempted to ask myself, although I am not such a puppy as to answer it so confidently as Temple did in his case; for just such looks, such flattering shyness, such half-permitted, half-returned caresses, had Monica Graysbrooke lavished on me! It is her way, the little witch, she is in no danger of misinterpretation from me, but young fellows like Frank are so presumptuous."

And so Annie seemed to think, though she looked a little perplexed.

"She is very inexperienced, Frank; I think you mistake a girlish love of admiration for a feeling of which she is as yet incapable."

The young man turned upon her, with a sudden fierceness, "Take care, Miss Barham, the hope of which you would rob me is my life!"

"Nay," she answered, gently, but yet

more earnestly, "not so, Frank, life includes the aims of a worthy manhood, that may—that *must* survive the hopes of youthful passion."

The light faded out of Temple's eyes, and his face looked wan and haggard, as he turned to me.

"You know her, Dr. Crofton, you have seen us together—do you think that I am deceiving myself, or that she is trifling with me?"

"My dear fellow, I think with Annie, that you attach too much importance to a mere girlish coquetry; and were it otherwise you do wrong—very wrong—in boasting of a young lady's preference for you, before she has herself confessed it!"

"I was not boasting—I was only confiding in my closest friends. Oh! Dr. Guy—Miss Barham—if you forbid me to hope you pronounce my doom!"

He was greatly excited—his face was flushed—his eyes had a wild glitter.

I looked at Annie—she understood me, and laying her hand on his arm, she spoke to him in her low, soothing voice, and drew him from the room. In a few minutes, I heard him quit the house, and she returned to me.

She came up to me, as I stood at the window. "Doctor Guy, what can be done for Frank? I am almost sure he deceives himself."

"From what Sir Charles has told me, Annie, I am sure he deceives himself."

"Ah, he has told you? why, Guy, what a silly business it seems on all sides!"

"Not on Monica's, surely. As the world goes, it will be a brilliant marriage for her."

"I did not mean that—I never pretend to pass judgment on those kind of arrangements; I meant what a silly thing it is that Monica should have imposed secresy on Sir Charles, and that he should have consented to it."

"Sir Charles is too yielding at all times;

but of course this state of things cannot last long. The worst of it is, that while it lasts we cannot undeceive Frank."

"Sir Charles is to blame, too; he and Jack Buckland, and that set, have amused themselves with making sport of Frank's folly—and their sport may be death to him."

"My dear Annie, how can you be so ridiculous! A sensible woman like you ought to know that boys like Frank do not die of their sentimental weaknesses."

"But in Frank's case there is, as you know, Dr. Crofton, the complication of physical debility and nervous excitability, with little intellectual or moral power to surmount or control it. I tremble for Frank; it was through my recommendation that Sir Charles gave him this situation; and he is the sole comfort of his widowed mother."

Her voice faltered, and the tears rose to her eyes. I took her hand—a pretty hand

has Annie Barham, more delicate in shape than Monica's, and as soft and white.

"My dear Annie, you alarm yourself needlessly; we will arrest the evil before much mischief is done. I will have some serious talk with Cotgrave and with Lady Janet. Some other employment shall be found for Frank, and he shall be quietly removed from Cleobury. Come, look up—don't cry—I can't bear that, you know."

"But I am not crying," she said, and looked up with a smile. Annie Barham had, in her youth, the sweetest smile I ever saw—and it is a charm that lingers longest. I stooped to imprint a brotherly kiss on her hand—the fair hand that still lay in mine—but my lips had scarcely touched it, when the door flew, or rather burst open, and in bounced Mrs. Gabriel Hartopp, our curate's four months' bride, and my pet aversion—the only woman in Cleobury—the only woman in the world—for whom I have a thorough and cordial antipathy. In she

bounced—with an excuse for a hat on her head, adorned with a macaw, or some such gaudy fowl, by way of feather, with a chignon—in colour, texture, and dimensions, like a small haystack—and her gown-tail streaming behind her, with much such an effect on her rotund, waddling figure, as the train of a peacock would have on a Muscovy duck.

She bounced up to Annie, and bestowed on her there and then a resounding kiss. In a general way, I have no objection at all to these endearments from ladies—but in the present instance I felt really thankful that Annie Barham, and not Guy Crofton, was the recipient. Then she turned, and addressed me—

"Well, Doctor! so this is where I've caught you! Upon my word! Here have I been hunting for you to go to poor Mrs. Smethwick's dear little baby, who is as ill as can be. Mr. What's-his-name, your new Assistant, is off to Lingford, and here I find

you courting Miss Barham, like any turtle-dove—at your age, too!"

I felt awfully confused. I know I turned quite scarlet—not for my own sake, of course—but it was so awkward for poor dear Annie! However, I tried to conceal my embarrassment, and divert the attack.

"Don't scold me, Mrs. Hartopp, and I'll tell you some news that will interest you; I know, from 'authentic sources,' that the invitations for Lady Janet's ball are to be issued immediately; now what will you give me to tell you the exact day fixed—before any other lady in Cleobury knows it?"

"As if I cared for balls!" returned the vixen, curling up her nose, which had a natural adaptation for the gesture. "I don't approve of married ladies dancing—especially clergymen's wives—and darling Gaby does not, either. And when is it to be, Miss Barham?"

Annie's eyes had been bent thoughtfully

on the floor during this debate ; she looked up with a slight start—

"When is what to be, Mrs. Hartopp ?"

"How innocent we look, to be sure!" (She was hardly accurate if the 'we' included herself.) "Why your marriage with Dr. Crofton, to be sure. I suppose you had fixed the day, when I found him kissing your hand ?"

Miss Barham smiled quite calmly, and replied, without the least sign of confusion—

"My dear Mrs. Hartopp, Dr. Crofton and I are such very old friends, that if he kissed my hand three times a day, no one would dream of connecting the act with such a meaning."

"Old friends, indeed !—old *lovers,* I have heard. It's such a very long courtship, it's time it should come to an end."

"Mrs. Gabriel, my dear, you must not be impertinent."

It was spoken with gentle dignity, and

rather in warning than reproof; but it had instant effect. My enemy coloured up, looked as foolish as she had made me look a moment before, and was glad to avail herself of the refuge she had denied to me—

"About Lady Janet's ball, Dr. Crofton —when is it to be, did you say?"

"I did not say, Mrs. Hartopp; you told me that you had no interest in such things."

"No more I have; but everybody will be there, they say—and of course I shall be expected to go, as the parson's wife, you see."

"O no, not at all; Miss Barham will represent our absent Rector's family, and I will let Lady Janet know that you object to balls."

"But Gaby will be there, of course, among all his parishioners—and he never likes to go anywhere without me."

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Hartopp—I

am forgetting your kind message just now —Mrs. Smethwick's baby, I think you said? I am off this moment—good-bye, ladies."

"But do tell us, Doctor——"

"No, no!" I answered,

"'He that will not when he may,
When he will, he shall have nay.'"

"Oh, you disagreeable old thing!" was the parting salutation of the elegant Mrs. Gabriel.

CHAPTER IX.

TREBLY TRAITRESS.

LADY JANET'S ball was a great Cleobury institution, and a peculiar one in some respects. It was neither a hunt ball, nor a tenants' ball, nor a charity ball—nor even a private ball—but a combination of all these. It had taken rise, some years back, when Sir Charles married Miss Forrester, and a grand ball was given at Heath Hill in acknowledgment of the fêtes which had welcomed the bride.

The following winter the gay assembly was again convened, but this time the more popular and mixed element was eliminated from it, and the invitations issued were to

the county gentry and the members of the Lingford Hunt, of which Sir Charles was master. Lady Cotgrave was slightly indisposed, and unable to receive her guests, but her mother took her place, and the ball at Heath Hill was then first named "Lady Janet's ball" from that circumstance.

For three years subsequent to her daughter's death, Lady Janet continued her annual visit to Sir Charles, but maintained a strict seclusion, receiving no ladies except the Rector's wife, and her sister-in-law, Miss Barham, for Mrs. Graysbrooke died before Sir Charles's marriage, and Monica was then a little girl at school.

But when these years of mourning had expired, the Heath Hill hospitality recommenced. The Hunt Ball was reorganised, the county families and the better class of tenants included in the invitations, and Lady Janet once more presided at its celebration, and received her son-in-law's guests.

So far there was nothing peculiar in the festival, which was thenceforth renewed at irregular intervals, but its arrangements were in many respects singular. In the first place Lady Janet issued the invitations in her own name, as well as Sir Charles's, as if she were mistress instead of guest. Then she never came to Cleobury, until the evening before the ball, or if she came sooner, she remained invisible, in her own apartments, and only burst on the delighted gaze of Cleobury, in full state, like a queen in her drawing-room receptions.

Like a queen, too, she received the homage of her guests, but scarcely condescended to welcome them, nor were they expected to address her, until special invitation to do so—with the exception, of course, of a few ladies whose rank or position gave them some privilege of equality. Perhaps Cleobury might have resented the insolence of such behaviour, but it soothed its wounded

dignity by the reflection that Lady Janet was not, after all, the mistress of Heath Hill, except in a temporary and provisional sense, and that the ball was, in fact, given by Sir Charles Cotgrave, who made up, by his good-natured affability and frankness, for his mother-in-law's short-comings. And although it was an *omnium gatherum*, from which no one above the rank of a petty tradesman was excluded, every one gladly accepted the invitation—not sorry, perhaps, for the occasion of mingling — the lower class to admire and emulate the higher, the higher to criticise and laugh at the lower. Then it was got up in first-rate style—I called it the *Canon* ball of the district, by which all its fêtes for twelve months afterwards were regulated.

Nor had we so many gala days at Cleobury that we could afford in over-scrupulousness to dispense with one. So there was joy in Cleobury, when Lady Janet's ball was announced for the tenth of No-

vember, and all the neighbouring gentry, with the indigenous squireens, clergy, lawyers and doctors, were bidden thereto.

Not the least pleasant result of the announcement was the sudden stimulus it imparted to our social life. Ladies gathered in little knots at the drapers' and milliners' at Lingford, and came back together to dinner or tea, or they "dropped in" to one another's houses to lunch, or to the nursery dinner, or were asked to bring their work, or to have a friendly hand at whist, or a round game. And at these little reunions the anticipated fête bore so large a share in the topics of conversation that it may be fairly suspected that it was the occasion of them.

In a small country circle, where every one knows what his *convive* has got to say, a new topic of general interest, however trifling, is a perfect boon.

Thence it arose that a few days before the event was to come off, my greeting to

my Assistant, as he came in, after my dinner had been cleared away, was—

"Roland, you are very late, you must hasten over your dinner, for you have got to dress for Major Graysbrooke's soirée—we do not keep fashionable hours here!"

"It is not much of a party?" he asked, languidly, as he rang the bell for the soup that Mrs. Pritchard was "hotting" for him (as she called it). I often observed that all the activity and energy my young companion displayed when there was work before him seemed to die out of him when leisure or amusement asserted a claim. It was not the affectation and indifference of a *blasé* puppy of the Lord Dundreary school, nor the vulgar insolence of a *parvenu*, who thinks himself superior to the society in which he mingles, but which he certainly does not adorn—nor the weary listlessness consequent on over-excitement or over-exertion; it was the grave abstraction of a man whose mind is too fully occu-

pied to permit him to give any attention to trifles which would otherwise have their use and place there. I sometimes felt quite provoked at his indifference to subjects which should have been all-engrossing to so young a man; youth was wasted on such a fellow! Oh, that I could have transferred my twenty years of seniority to his shoulders! I should have been none the worse for the exchange, and he—I verily believe —would scarcely have noticed it.

"Is it much of a party?" asks he.

"Why, no. Major Graysbrooke never gives parties—he is living as economically as he can, the selfish old sinner, on his daughter's accomplishments, which were paid for out of her own fortune. 'A little music from my Money' is supposed to be a substitute for the bottle of old port or sherry to which he used to treat his friends, when his wife was alive and he had the spending of her fortune. Mind, I don't say it is a bad substitute, by any means,

but I think he might give us both with advantage."

"Dr. Crofton," said Roland, with a laugh, which I was always glad to hear from him, "I had no idea that you could miss anything so material as port and sherry in the society of such a sylph as Miss Graysbrooke. Is she to be our sole enchantress to-night?"

"Yes, there is no one to dispute her reign at present—at least until this beauty of Sir Charles's makes her appearance," Roland's brow clouded slightly, "there will be no one at the Cedars to-night, except Annie Barham and Mrs. Hartopp, with her 'Gaby darling.'"

"Ah, the little curate, with his wife, whom you dislike so?"

"Dislike her! I should think so; in the first place, she is hideous."

"No woman can be *that*. As for Mrs. Hartopp, I have never seen anything of her yet but her chignon, the magnitude of

which so amazed me, that I never thought of overtaking the lady beyond it. Perhaps the Rev. Gabriel got no farther when he fell in love with her!"

"I don't believe he ever fell in love with her—it is preposterous to suppose that any man ever could fall in love with such a——"

"Order! order! Doctor!"

"All right! I was going to say, he was past his first youth—a good deal past—when still a poor curate, with no hope of preferment; this girl was the daughter of a farmer in his parish, and wealthy for her class. I fancy he took her in consideration of the liquidation of certain debts that had long harassed him—is it not Shakespeare, who says

> "'Misery makes us acquainted with strange bed-fellows?'"

"A poetical motto for such a prosaic fact as a marriage for money. Who else will be there?"

"I don't think Sir Charles Cotgrave will —I saw him starting by the train for Cleobury; the pretty Monica keeps him at a distance: but Frank Temple will be there."

"Ah, Miss Barham seems uneasy about that intimacy—does the heiress love the young tutor, do you think?"

"I wonder at your asking such a question, Roland—you, who call Miss Graysbrooke a coquette!"

"But even coquettes do sometimes love, after a fashion; the cuckoo, naturalists tell us, has been known to build a nest, though the experiment seems not to have answered, as it has not been repeated."

"She is only playing with Frank, but the sport is a dangerous one, and I intend to use my influence—"

"Ah! you have influence over Miss Graysbrooke?"

"I am sure I have; I am certain that I could lead that sweet girl to do anything that I should seriously advise."

Roland raised his eyebrows incredulously.

"You think I deceive myself? that lads like you and Frank would have more power over a girl of eighteen than a man of middle age? Not a bit of it—you young fellows are either too timid, and she despises you, or too passionate, and she shrinks from you. The man who has real power over a girl is one whose age gives him a claim to her respect, and whose sensibility wins her affection, whose calm tenderness never alarms her virgin coyness, while she never dreams of practising coquettish wiles on one whose sagacity would detect, and his self-command defeat them, who—by Jove, sir, you are laughing at me! I believe your thought at this moment, is, that if you chose to enter the lists with me, for little Monica's favour, I should be nowhere!"

"I assure you, Dr. Crofton, no such profane thought crossed my imagination; my impression is, that both Frank with his romance, and you with your platonics, will

one day find yourselves the sport of a cunning sorceress in an enchanted maze, where she will have beguiled *you*, but where you will never lead *her* !"

As if I were not a truer judge than *he* could be, of the little girl I fondled as a baby !

We were just on the point of starting, when my presence was required at a neighbour's, and I sent Wentworth on before me to the Cedars, and followed him an hour later.

Notwithstanding his slighting comments on Miss Graysbrooke, I found him bending over her in very courtly fashion, arranging her music for her on the piano, while she warbled, in her clear bird-like voice, an air from an Italian opera — all shivers and shakes, and trills and twirls. The old Major was doing the gallant to my *bête noire*, Mrs. Gaby, who sat simpering and giggling, one hand in her husband's, the other in that of gentle Annie Barham, who

held it because it was given her to hold, and not knowing what else to do with it. Mrs. Gaby was fond of such demonstrations.

Frank Temple sat at a little distance apart, absently ranging some chessmen on a table near him. Though Annie's eyes wandered often in search of his, his were fixed wistfully on Monica, who continued to chat and laugh, chirp and twitter, with Roland, and never once looked towards him.

On my entrance, these groups broke up to re-organise themselves. The Major, the Hartopps, and Dr. Guy, sat down to a game of whist. Roland moved away from our young hostess, to place himself beside Miss Barham, and Frank naturally profited by the occasion to take his vacated seat. But Monica seemed not to heed his approach.

"Mr. Wentworth," she said, "ask Miss Barham to sing for you. She will please

you, I know, since you are fond of English ballads."

The request was, of course, seconded by us all; and Annie, who never thinks any sacrifice too great, or any effort too small that contributes to the happiness or enjoyment of others, went at once to the piano, and sang two or three pretty English lyrics, with the grace and feeling that gives such a charm to everything she does.

My eyes dwelt involuntarily on her as she sang. Her figure was so slight and girlish, that, but for the cap—a pretty lace cap, but not at all girlish—I could almost have fancied I had still before me my Annie of old times. Suddenly she looked round and smiled at me—yes, at me—and then struck into the old melody—

"Believe me, if all those endearing young charms."

It had been a favourite song of mine in my credulous youth. I used to sing it myself to *her* then—why did she sing it to

me now? Was she, too, remembering old times — or was she covertly reproaching me?

"Doctor, it's your play!—why, what are you thinking of? The ace was mine!" cried my incensed partner, as I threw down the king of trumps.

"I beg pardon, Mrs. Hartopp—it was the delightful air—"

"The delightful *singer*, you mean!" retorted Mrs. Gabriel — and leaning across the table, she hissed into my ear, like the viper she is—"Don't be frightened, Doctor —*I won't tell!*"

Oh! confound her!

Then Annie ceased singing, and wandered off into a kind of musical reverie, in which, as was her wont sometimes, she seemed to lose herself in a maze of harmonious sounds—through which I, who am not musical, had no clue, and could not follow her.

Wentworth was leaning on the table,

looking intently at Monica's photograph-book. I suspected he was gazing at the picture of that Fair Rosamond; but, if so, it was not with approval, for his brow was contracted, and his mouth wore that expression it often had when he was silent—of grave and sad resolution. His thoughts, too, were far away—roving, like mine, like Annie's, in some Past, that might have seemed to him almost as remote as did ours to us—though the years that rolled between us and ours could be counted only by months from his.

Meantime Monica, almost unconsciously it seemed, had glided to the bay-window, and drawing back a heavy fold of the curtain, stood looking out into the night, while Frank Temple followed, and stood beside her. I sat nearest to the window, but my back was towards it. I could only catch a glimpse of the pair by turning my head; and as they spoke together in a low voice, I could not have distinguished their words

had I not been gifted with a singularly acute sense of hearing.

My interest in them—(not curiosity)—naturally led me to listen to what they were saying—or how else could I reprove Miss Graysbrooke, as I intended to do, for her thoughtless encouragement of that poor foolish youth? But after all I did not hear much.

"What a lovely night!"

"Brilliant starlight."

"Mild as May; see how those cedars fling an eerie shadow on the wall—you cannot see it where you stand—nearer this way."

Then followed a murmur from Frank, that I could not catch.

"Oh, I cannot, indeed!" (from Monica). "How can you ask me such a thing?"

"Only for two minutes. I never see you alone now—you are only inaccessible to *me*—you would do as much for Dr. Guy."

"That is quite different."

"You would do it for Sir Charles—but of course *that* is different, too—he is my employer. I am only—well—you would do it for that strange doctor—whom you have not known a month."

"You are ungrateful, Frank." (Too soft a tone, Monica—too soft by half!) "Miss Barham scolded me for walking by the river-side with you, the day Charlie caught cold—and papa was there too, then."

"I only ask for two minutes—to make my happiness for life!" (Oh, these lads! what does "life" mean with them?)

"Well, perhaps I'll see about it."

I lost what followed—then Temple urged more vehemently—

"Now!—they will not miss you now!"

"No, indeed—not now—nor—"

Here Mrs. Hartopp threw down her cards, and rose—

"Positively, I will play no more with Dr. Crofton. Major Graysbrooke, you

must excuse me—but if you can find me no better partner—"

"Why, my dear madam," remonstrated the poor Major, "the Doctor is the best player in Cleobury."

"Then Cleobury cannot play whist."

"Mrs. Hartopp is quite right, I plead guilty, I have played very badly to-night —I have been listening to Miss Barham's music; I daresay Wentworth will take my hand for me."

"I won't play any more to-night, thank you. Gaby darling, Major Graysbrooke will have a game of chess with you—and Miss Monica, if you have done flirting with Mr. Temple, will you show me that work you said Lady Janet Forrester had sent you for a fender stool. Oh, dear, Mr. Temple, I hope I have not frightened you away!"

"I am obliged to go early. Sir Charles does not like me to be away late from Charlie when he is from home—thanks,

Major Graysbrooke, I must go indeed, it is a long walk to Heath Hill, but the moon is so bright."

"The moon? my dear boy—the moon does not rise for two hours yet!"

"To be sure—I meant the stars."

Poor Frank! he was quite confused—vexed, I dare say, that Monica could not go out with him. I was glad she had so much prudence, though it did not say much for her that he should have dared to make such a request; but she is so childish!

She came forward, smiling, when Frank had left the room, and she and Mrs. Hartopp were soon buried in the mysterious litter of the work-table.

Annie was still playing; I went up to her (not without a furtive glance at Mrs. Gabriel), and I looked over Roland's shoulder as I passed him.

It was, as I thought, Miss Gilroyd's portrait that he had been contemplating so earnestly.

"A fine face, is it not, Wentworth?"

"Yes," he answered, carelessly, "it is well done, better than most English photographs—our light is scarcely transparent enough to do full justice to this art."

And closing the book, he rose, and went up to Monica, who glanced up in his face with her pretty dimpling smile, and made room for him beside her on the sofa, with that gesture of hers—half childlike, half imperious—that I think no mortal can resist.

Annie continued playing — low and dreamily. I bent over her.

"Sir Charles's secret is still kept, Annie."

"Ah, poor Sir Charles!" she answered, "it is unfair in Monica to impose such reserve on him."

"What do you think is her reason for it?"

Miss Barham hesitated—then she said, "I am afraid Monica is scarcely prepared to accept the responsibilities to which she has thoughtlessly pledged herself; she will not give Sir Charles the authority over her

that he might claim if her engagement was openly acknowledged."

"Poor dear little Monica, she is such a child!"

"Nay, Dr. Crofton, she has accepted a woman's trust — she must discharge a woman's duties; she is sadly regardless of them at present!" And Annie looked round quite severely at my pretty pet, who was listening to something that Roland was saying with such an earnest gravity in her downcast eyes and rosebud lips—no levity at all about her; but her quaker-like demureness did not mollify Miss Barham one bit—what would she have said if she had overheard, as I did, that conversation with Frank Temple, in the window?

"We must deal tenderly with her, Annie, she is a giddy little thing, but so loving, so simple-hearted; she requires the guidance of some one to whom she can look up—I must take her in hand!"

Annie ceased playing, and turned her

thoughtful eyes on me, with the same question Roland had asked, and in the same tone of incredulity, too.

"You think you can influence Monica, Guy?"

"I am sure I can—she is very fond of me; I am sure she would not risk the forfeiture of my—my esteem—for fifty Frank Temples! I am certain that I have but to point out to her the danger of these thoughtless coquetries, to induce her to give them up at once; there is nothing so charming as Monica's docility."

A grave smile, not without archness, flitted over Miss Barham's features.

"You had better delegate your influence to Sir Charles, Guy. Monica's docility will be seen to more advantage with *him*."

What could she mean? I wondered. Surely she did not scent danger to Monica in the exercise of my influence over her? She knows I am too honourable to abuse it.

The Major, having won an easy conquest

over the parson, now came forward in high good humour, and the conversation became general, and presently turned on the approaching festivity at Heath Hill.

"I hear," said Mrs. Gaby, "that Lady Janet is the haughtiest woman in the world —and that no one is allowed to go up and speak to her at Heath Hill, unless she sends for them! I never heard of such intolerable insolence."

"Lady Janet is old," pleaded Annie Barham, "she is blind, and it would be fatiguing to her to receive strangers whose faces she cannot see. To spare her this embarrassment, only her intimate friends are brought up to her whose voices she knows!"

"Has she been long blind?"

"She has been totally blind for two years only; the physicians say that the disease was greatly accelerated by her grief for her only daughter's death."

"But that is years ago; Charles Cotgrave is quite a big boy—and a horrible pickle he

is—I wouldn't be his step-mother for something. Why does not Sir Charles marry again, and have a younger lady with eyes, to receive his friends, instead of that blind old arrogance."

So far Mrs. Gabriel Hartopp. I glanced at Monica. She looked as unconcerned as if the subject had been one in which she had not the remotest interest. Sweet child! her heart is yet unawakened; the "reluctant feet" have not yet crossed the ice-pure brook of child-like simplicity for the warmer, wilder wave of passion. Will Sir Charles's be the hand that will lead her over it? But what a sly puss it is, to betray no sign of consciousness! The old Major was less self-restrained. He reddened, and stammered, and fluttered at Mrs. Gabriel's enquiry, as if *he* had been the Baronet's bride elect.

"And so he will, Mrs. Hartopp; that is I don't doubt he will—someday he will take a younger lady to grace his establishment,

you may be very sure, and a nice position it will be for any lady, eh, Miss Barham?"

The sudden appeal to Annie, with the Major's hurried and significant manner, quite bewildered Mrs. Hartopp.

"You don't mean to say?" she exclaimed. "Why, Miss Barham, are all the gentlemen in Cleobury in love with you?"

"It would be very nice for them if they were," said Monica; then correcting herself hastily, "it is very nice for them if they are, I mean."

"Not for them *all* surely, Miss Graysbrooke?" laughed the parson; "I am sure Miss Barham herself would be the last to wish such a monopoly."

"My wishes," said that lady, rising, "are very reasonable. I wish every choice to be wise, and every love to be faithful, and I wish you all good-night."

"None of those wishes are quite reasonable," said Wentworth, smiling, "but I, for

one, will echo the last, if you will allow me to see you home."

Here the little maid entered and announced :—

"Mr. Hartopp's shay, please."

"Shall we set you down at your door, Dr. Crofton?"

"No, no, Crofton," interposed the Major, "you must not desert us so soon. I want ten minutes' chat with you before you go."

"Then I must have five granted me for a little private scolding of Miss Monica; you—you naughty girl, you!" and I shook my finger menacingly at the culprit, who having made her adieu to her parting guests, came and seated herself on a low stool at her father's feet, her white arms folded round his knee, her dimpled chin resting upon them, her large blue eyes lifted to mine—little dear! to call such an innocent baby a flirt, indeed! a stepmother for Charlie! she is fitter to be his playmate! It is a sacrifice—a downright

sacrifice—to make that girl a step-mother! The old Major had nothing particular to say, after all; he never had, silly old creature—the only gift he ever had was the talent of taking care of himself, and finding out what was for his own advantage.

But when I rose to depart, little Monica sprang to her feet:—

"Doctor, I can't sleep till I have that scolding you threatened. I will walk down to the gate with you."

"My dear Monica," objected the Major, "at this hour!—I cannot allow it, you will take cold."

"Only one minute, papa, it is not cold, I will put on my cloak;" and before another word could be said she had fluttered out of the room, and fluttered back again, wrapped in a rose-coloured opera cloak, with such an exquisite pink hood drawn over her sweet face. A June rose she looked, all flush and fragrance! She clasped her soft hands round my arm. I could not forbid her to

come with me; such an act of self-denial was too heroic for our times; besides, it was really a fine night. I took two or three turns with her up and down the short avenue—perfectly allowable, surely, with a girl whom I had known from the first moment of her existence? And I employed that time in loyal remonstrance with her, on the imprudence of her conduct with young Frank Temple. Of course, I said nothing to betray the confidence Sir Charles had reposed in me, I only represented to her the folly and cruelty of encouraging the attentions of a youth who made no secret of his devotion to her, and to whom she could never be anything, with the consent of her friends. She listened so patiently, she excused herself so sweetly:—

"Dear Dr. Guy!" (she laid such a caressing emphasis on that "dear" it went right through and through me!) "Dear Dr. Guy, I am really so fond of Frank—I

know he is very foolish, and very wrong to talk to me as he does sometimes—but you know he is not over-wise, and I cannot bear to vex him."

"But you do not love him, Mona?"

"I don't think I love anyone, that is any *man* in the world, Dr. Guy, except papa and—"

And she paused, her pretty head pensively on one side, her blue eyes bent meditatively on mine—the little pink rose in the white moonlight.

"And— ?" I asked breathlessly.

"Except papà, of course," she repeated, "and—and *you* !"

She said it with such an artless, innocent earnestness, such a child-like fearlessness of wrong—the veriest coxcomb could not have presumed on the confession. And yet her voice softened a little, her eyelids faltered and drooped. I am sorry for Sir Charles, too, the chords of that virgin heart lie beneath his touch, and he knows

not how to awaken its music. Yet, oh, how I envy him! When Monica had left me and tripped back towards the house, I stood awhile leaning on the gate, and revolving in my mind these bitter-sweet meditations, and then, scarcely conscious of what I was doing, re-commenced slowly to pace back down the avenue; I was just approaching the turn from which the house would have become visible, when I heard the suppressed tones of a man's voice. I stopped and looked eagerly in the direction whence the sound proceeded; could my eyes deceive me? At a few yards' distance, partly shadowed by a clump of tall laurels, stood a form — by Jove! *two* forms! I drew aside on the turf that bordered the gravel walk, and keeping close in the shade of the bushes, crept softly up, until my sharp ears could recognise the voice of Frank Temple, and my eyes—not quite so sharp—could yet make out the light flowing skirts that draped the *mignonne* figure

of that little traitress, Monica! Traitress! double, treble, traitress! Was it for this she had stolen forth, making of me, the respectable and respected Guy Crofton, the cat's paw with which to get a moonlight meeting with her lover? Traitress to *me*, to Sir Charles—yes, and to Frank Temple, too—out of her own mouth I could convict her!

"You are very wrong, Mr. Temple, loitering about here like a poacher," (poacher, indeed—and on his employer's preserves, too!) "and you have nothing to say to me but what you have no business to say at all."

"You are too cruel, Monica. You lure me one moment with hope—only to crush me with this chilling indifference—yet while you consent to meet me—"

"Meet you!—I came out for a stroll with Dr. Crofton; how could I guess that you were lingering here among the bushes—hours after everybody was gone home?"

(Come, that's better—perhaps she did *not* know he was there ?)

"I told you I would wait till the lights were extinguished in the parlour."

"Did you ? I did not hear half you said, you spoke so low. Let go my hand—I must go in *at once*."

"Leave me but one kind word to live upon until—"

Here a light blazed from the hall-door, and the Major shouted from the house—

"Monica ! where are you, child ?—come in directly !"

She broke from her suitor's hold, and flitted down the path like a moonbeam—no, like a falling star, rather !—while I stood still, as Temple brushed past me, unsuspicious of my proximity. When he had quitted the grounds, I followed slowly. I am not sure that I *do* envy Sir Charles so much, after all !

CHAPTER X.

LADY JANET'S BALL.

"Nought I have ever seen in waking hours
Rivals in charm this shape—"

LORD LYTTON.

"WHY, Doctor! I was afraid you were going to play truant. Our Cleobury ladies have been looking out for you this hour."

This was Sir Charles's greeting to me as I entered the ball-room at Heath Hill—a room of spacious dimensions, that had been built for such festivities by the former Baronet, although of late years it had been rarely used, except for a kind of lumber room. At present, however, it retained no signs of such a degradation. It was pro-

fusely and tastefully decorated. Lots of evergreens, of wreaths, of hot-house flowers —lots of chandeliers (gas had not yet arrived at Cleobury)—and, best adornment in my eyes, lots of pretty women! The band of the yeomanry corps from Lingford was playing a lively valse, dancers were whisking and whirling about, and Sir Charles himself—whose duty of welcoming his mother's guests was nearly fulfilled—stood with his arm round the waist of a buxom damsel, the daughter of one of his tenants, who was panting yet from her recent exertions, and the pleasing excitement of having "the Squire" for her partner.

The room was crowded, and although the company was certainly "mixed," it was, to my taste, none the worse for that. But then I do not pretend to be aristocratic — I am vulgar enough to prefer variety to monotony in a ball-room, or in a parterre. I am not at all shocked at seeing

people enjoy themselves. It was a positive treat to me to see little Dolly Stevens, the timber merchant's niece—all flowers, curls, tinsel, and smiles—listening, and quivering from head to foot with delight as she listened, to Captain Smith, of the Volunteer Rifles, in full uniform, as he poured his soft nothings into her reddening ear; and though I heard that conceited puppy, Waldemar Ellesmere, (whose mother was a Viscount's daughter, and whose father was the great brewer—the progenitor, so to say, of all the beer-houses in the county), after gazing at the girl for a moment through his gold eye-glass, murmur contemptuously to one of the London "tons," as he turned away—

"Let me pass, my dear fellow, 'the dairy-man's daughter' is not to my taste."

I believe, in his heart, he would have enjoyed a good romping turn with pretty Dolly a vast deal more than playing Gold-stick-in-waiting to that haughty Miss

Jermyn, of Stoke Manor, who stands as motionless, and nearly as mute, as a figure in wax-work, seeming wholly unconscious of the presence of man or woman in that crowded saloon, except of the dozen or two who belong to her clique. She will not even condescend to criticise—she simply ignores the existence of her social inferiors. That woman's faculty of self-isolation would be a curious psychological study, but at present it had no interest for me. My sympathies were all with what Ellesmere scornfully termed "the populace." How could it be otherwise, when among these were all my patients and long-familiar friends? Those girls—I may say I was the first man they had ever smiled upon! The locks (or part of them) that formed those massive chignons, or luxuriant ringlets, I had twined round my fingers when they were scarce two inches long! Those round white arms still bear the scars of my friendly lancet. Their mothers, too—ranged

in solemn rows round the room, each matronly eye singling out its own peculiar treasure, to follow her through the mazes of the dance, or of some promising flirtation—how often had they poured into my friendly ear their anxieties for those frail treasures (frail only *then*, I mean), imperilled by some childish malady. How pleasant it was to look round upon them here, all bright and happy—faces that had often looked piteously up to me, pale with suffering, flushed with fever, from the twilight of a sick chamber—from the pillows of a sick bed! I was not destined, however, to linger long among these—

"Friend, go up higher," was the purport of my host's next address to me, when a second whirl brought him within hail of me; and at the same moment the music stopped, and he delivered up his delighted charge to a young gentleman to whom she was due for the next dance.

"Are you standing here still, Crofton?

—and you have not spoken to my mother-in-law yet ?"

"Nay, Sir Charles ; I have received no permission. I know Lady Janet does not like intrusion."

"Oh, nonsense !" he answered, laughing, "you are privileged at all times ; and I am sure she is expecting you. She is at the other end of the room—can you find your way to her, or do you require my escort ?"

"No, no ; I will venture alone, since you have countersigned my passport."

And I proceeded to make my way through the crowd to the upper end of the room, where Lady Janet Forrester sat, on a kind of dais, slightly elevated above the common floor, and defended from the pressure of the vulgar herd by a *cordon sanitaire* of the *élite* of the neighbourhood, proving an impenetrable barrier, which those who possessed not the talisman of rank or position would never have dreamt of breaking through, unbidden. Lady

Janet was a small, fragile-looking woman, of about sixty; her features were delicate, but rather sharp; the expression that was banished from her sightless eyes with their dark-blue glasses, might be read in the nervous, tremulous movement of the muscles round her compressed lips, and the quick motion of her head, turning restlessly from one to another of the speakers about her. She was very plainly dressed; her hair was silver-white; her whole air and gesture denoted an excitable and irritable temperament, repressed by the influence of habit and self-control, but still more by the sedative effect which, sooner or later, blindness produces.

Nearest to her in the group that surrounded her, stood Monica Graysbrooke, and a young lady whom I at once recognised as the original of the vignette portrait in Monica's album. The Major was there, too, in all his glory—cordial and friendly to the grandees, familiarly re-

spectful, or respectfully familiar, to her ladyship, affable and jocose to the "mixed multitude," among whom he occasionally made little descents in search of some favoured individual or party who was to be honoured by a special presentation to the great lady in the chair. Little Charlie, leaning on his grandmother's lap, in his violet-velvet dress, and long golden curls, looked like a page of the middle ages. That child would have been much better in his bed than in that over-heated room; but we are not satisfied in these days unless we make fools of our children as well as ourselves. In this instance, at least, Charlie was only looking on at the follies of his elders, and not, as in a juvenile party, attempting to ape them. Monica looked charming, in her favourite colour, rose-pink, that so well became her wax-white complexion and bright fair hair. Her dress was something light and transparent, and floated around her like a very cloud. There

was a wreath of pearls round her head, and pearls on her arms and bosom. I do not think the general effect would have been injured had there been just a little bit of lace on the sleeves and the—what do they call it—tucker? or bodice? But there—girls will be in the fashion! and surely a civilised maiden with *very little* raiment may be as innocent—or nearly so—as a savage maiden with *none?*

She stood near Lady Janet, conversing with Aurora Comberhill, one of the party from Stoke Manor. Her blue eyes had their wonted expression of infantine simplicity, through which, from time to time, an arch gaiety would dimple and sparkle, like the twinkle of a sunlit brook. She seemed so engrossed by what her friend was saying, that though I watched her attentively, I never once saw her glance across the room, to where her affianced husband stood, nor did she address look or word to Frank Temple, who in his capacity of nurse

boy to Charlie, stood among the group surrounding Lady Janet, and kept casting such wistful eyes on the destined Lady of Heath Hill, that Sir Charles, I thought, must have been as blind as his mother-in-law, if he had not detected the youth's love secret.

But Monica, little jade! took not the slightest notice of his appealing glances, and seemed to have totally forgotten the whisper behind the window curtains and the passionate prayer among the moonlight shadows.

Very unlike Miss Graysbrooke was Lady Janet's lady-in-waiting, Rosamond Gilroyd, as unlike as Diana to Euphrosyne, as a swan to a humming-bird, as a pale-tinted, fire-hearted opal to a prismatic crystal, with its ever-shifting dyes. In the exquisite proportions of that "imperial moulded form," the most critical eye could have detected no fault—

> "A daughter of the gods, divinely tall,
> And most divinely fair."

Not fair either, for Rosamond was a decided brunette; her hair was as black as—as—rather than use that trite comparison, "a raven's wing," I will say as black as my *boot*, her eyebrows, arched and delicately pencilled, on a low, white forehead, were as black as her hair, and as black the long lashes that deepened the line of the magnificent dark eyes they shadowed. If there was a fault in her face, it was that her mouth, though well-formed, was rather large, but who could quarrel with excess in this direction when the lips were coral, and the teeth were pearls? Not that this last item was revealed to me until some time later; at the moment I first beheld her, standing behind her patroness's chair, grave, cold, and stately, she might not, for all I could see, have had a tooth in her head. Her port was that of a queen, but of a queen in captivity. Only, as I approached, and Charlie sprang towards me, with a joyful cry, "Dr. Guy, Grandmamma,

Dr. Guy!" the girl lifted her head and turned towards me, and as her eyes met mine I fancied she read the admiration expressed in them, for a rich carnation rushed over her cheek and throat, with a sudden flush that faded as quickly, while I made my salutations to Lady Janet, and to such of my acquaintance as were near her.

At that moment Sir Charles advanced to claim Miss Graysbrooke for the next dance, and, as he led her away, his mother-in-law turned to me,

"Dr. Crofton," she said, "you were right in the warning you gave me years ago, and I pay the penalty of my self-indulgence, now."

"A melancholy self-indulgence, Lady Janet!"

"But not the less one, and from which I ought to have refrained, as you advised me, if only for the sake of this dear child," laying her hand caressingly on her grandson's golden curls; "Dr. Crofton, what I feel

most acutely in this privation, is that I cannot see him." She spoke in a low voice, and the well-bred circle around her fell back a little, not to intrude on her confidence, "You know his constitution better than the London physicians—tell me, do you think he is growing delicate?"

"Not in the least, Lady Janet; he requires care, as most nervous, excitable children do, but he is as strong and healthy as a lion's cub."

"It is such a relief to me to hear you say so—I have been longing to talk to you as I can hardly do now, and here—" and then she added sharply, "why have you not been to see me sooner?"

"My dear lady, I should not have presumed—"

"Ridiculous! you have always free access to me—you do not require formalities to remind you of your position, you are not always stretching up to some platform above you, like these vulgarites!" and the lady

swept her slender jewelled hand abroad with a gesture that made the flattering term "vulgarites" seem rather comprehensive; moreover, there was an emphasis on the demonstrative pronoun that sufficiently indicated that I was not exempted from their ranks.

"How many years is it since we met?" she continued, "no, no—you know what I mean—how many years since I *saw* you? —three?—am I altered much in that time? —are you?"

"Your ladyship is considerably thinner, and those blue glasses alter you; but on the whole, there is not much change. The last question I can scarcely be expected to be able to answer."

She turned to where her *dame de compagne* stood.

"Miss Gilroyd, come here; this young lady sees for me, Dr. Crofton. Show him to me, Miss Gilroyd."

The girl came forward, and her splendid

eyes rested on my face, steadily, coldly, as they would have gazed on a painting or a statue. Then she spoke, in a low, sad tone, like the sighing of the wind in the tree tops — musical, but with a music that seemed to come from heights or depths far distant. "He is middle aged, he is under middle height, he is fair, stout, fresh-coloured, his hair is thin, and slightly gray," (how could she find *that* out?) "he looks kindly, sincere, and glad hearted, like a man who has always been happy himself, and who likes to see others happy; he bears no sign of past sorrow, he has not fought, nor suffered."

And having said this in a voice as unimpassioned as her look, and with apparently an entire indifference to the effect her criticism might produce on its unwilling object—Miss Gilroyd drew back behind the elder lady's chair, and her beautiful face resumed its former expression of proud and cold serenity. My surprise kept me speech-

less, and Lady Janet laughed a little low laugh.

"She has sketched a faithful portrait of you, Doctor, I can recognise you in it, unchanged. By the fidelity of her descriptions of people I know, I can measure the trust I may repose in her portraits of those who are strangers to me."

"Such outspoken fidelity may be embarrassing sometimes, Lady Janet, to the artist no less than to her models?"

"I daresay it is sometimes, but it is her duty; I engaged her to fulfil it, and I do not try her very severely. These likenesses are generally sketched in private, unless when I wish to give some very conceited person a lesson now and then."

"And do you describe your own sex as impartially, Miss Gilroyd?" I asked, glancing rather uneasily at the young lady, for Lady Janet spoke so significantly of "a very conceited person," for all the world as if she meant *me*.

"Not to their faces," she answered quietly and gravely, "her Ladyship generally spares me a task so dangerous as *that*."

"You think then they have less courage to hear the truth of themselves, than we men have?"

But before she could reply Charlie interrupted us.

"Look, Dr. Guy! there is Miss Barham; grandmamma wants Miss Barham, don't you grandma'?"

"Is she coming this way?" asked the blind woman, turning her sightless eyes to her little grandson.

"No, she is in the crowd, standing near the door," I said, "shall I bring her up to—"

"Yes, but stop, Dr. Crofton, who is with her!"

"She came in with Mr. Wentworth, my Assistant, madam, at your service."

"Oh yes, I remember; Major Grays-

brooke was speaking of him yesterday. Wentworth, it is a good name; you plebs. often have good names, but you never know how you came by them, nor what to do with them. Miss Gilroyd, does Mr. Wentworth look like a gentleman?"

I turned at this appeal and looked at Miss Gilroyd.—I had not thought she was so pale! But she answered very calmly:—

"He looks quite like a gentleman, Lady Janet."

"*Like* a gentleman?" repeated her mistress, "aye, there it is; many a man with no claim at all to the distinction, may 'look like' a gentleman, but *is* he one?"

An expression of scornful disgust flitted over Rosamond's features, but the old lady's insolence only amused me, I had got used to it years ago; these nettles do not sting if you grasp them. I answered laughing:—

"I will send him up to you with Miss

Barham, Lady Janet, and you can determine the point for yourself."

So saying, I quitted the august presence, and as I was making way through the obscure throng below the daïs, my eyes fell on Sir Charles Cotgrave and Monica, squeezed up in a little cosy corner behind a deaf old lady, and a fat gentleman as deaf as herself. Sir Charles was looking down on his pretty companion with a pleading, lover-like air, and bending over her till his streaming whiskers nearly swept her cheek. And Miss Monica was nestling close to his side, her sweet blue eyes lifted to his, her cherry lips put up, as if offering a baby kiss, though, of course, they didn't, for the old couple before them had eyes, if they had not ears. By Jove! I forgot all about Temple—and I *did* envy Sir Charles then! Annie and Roland were still near the door when I got up to them. She was talking gaily to Major Graysbrooke. He was gazing fixedly, in rapt contemplation

of the groups at the upper end of the room.

"Annie," I said, as I took her offered hand, "do explain to me how the young lady standing behind Lady Janet is dressed. My little patient, Mary Owen, will expect me to-morrow to give her every detail of the costumes of the great lady's 'following,' so I must get myself well up on the subject."

Annie laughed as she glanced towards Miss Gilroyd.

"I do not wonder, Dr. Guy, that you are bewildered as to the lady's dress. Such a face as that might dazzle any man."

"But what has she got on?"

"Why, her dress is rather matronly, certainly, for so young a girl."

"My dear Annie, she is not so very young—she must be twenty-four or five."

"Oh, to be sure—that verges on the antique with you, I forgot—well, this old lady of twenty-four is dressed in black lace

over white satin, and it is looped up with sprigs of coral. Do you like that toilette, Mr. Wentworth, you seem to be studying it very critically?"

But Wentworth seemed not to hear her.

"Thanks, Miss Barham; now I will deliver my message. Her ladyship desires your attendance at the foot of her throne, with Mr. Wentworth."

But, to my surprise, Roland demurred—

"I will transfer Miss Barham to your charge, Dr. Crofton. I see a friend yonder whom I wish to join."

"Presently, my boy; you must come to Lady Janet first—she wishes to speak to you."

Thereupon he reluctantly submitted, and was led up to "the throne."

Annie was received very kindly—she brings her welcome everywhere—and she presented Mr. Wentworth to the blind lady, who instantly addressed her companion—

"Miss Gilroyd, show me Mr. Wentworth."

But this time Rosamond did not obey. Roland looked at her, and bowed gravely—almost coldly. She raised those glorious eyes of hers to his face with an expression I could not fathom; there was in it a proud humility—a sad appeal—which seemed to meet no response, for they fell almost instantly — and she grew so pale! Lady Janet reiterated her command, peevishly—

"Show me Dr. Crofton's Assistant, Rosamond Gilroyd!"

And then the girl looked up again, and looked round with a piteous, supplicating glance, which Annie seemed to understand, and hastened to her help.

"Let me show him to you, dear Lady Janet," she said, with that low, sweet laugh, that used to thrill me so—twenty-five years ago—"let me tell you how we of Cleobury see Mr. Wentworth—the weak see strength in him—the timid see courage

—the unhappy see a comforter! Only the false turn from him, because they recognise him as *true*."

"You are as sentimental as ever, Annie Barham," said Lady Janet, "and Miss Gilroyd is more matter-of-fact, if you would only let her speak."

"Oh, have some mercy on me, Lady Janet, I entreat you!" interposed the victim of this queer vivisection; "remember, I am almost a stranger here, and I claim the rights of hospitable forbearance."

"He has a pleasant voice," observed the blind lady, pensively; "well accented, and well modulated—I suppose he *is* a gentleman!"

The perfect gravity with which this conclusion was announced, produced a general laugh, in which Roland joined; but Rosamond had resumed her former air of impassibility, and stood serious and silent behind her patroness, as before. I was

about to address her, when the Reverend Gabriel Hartopp made his way through the aristocratic ring, with his odious bride on his arm. She *did* look odious! Mrs. Gaby's hair is not golden, but her complexion is. I don't think either poets or novelists praise a golden skin—although I have heard of an adventurous writer who endowed his heroine with "gold-green eyes." But Mrs. Gaby's eyes are blue, and look in her face like turquoises set in amber. Her nose has every objectionable point that a nose can have—except that, in a literal sense, it has no point at all. Mrs. Gabriel's nose is, morally, as well as physically, repellent, for she turns it up at everybody. I said that Rosamond's mouth, though beautiful, was too large — but Mrs. Gabriel's!—you could see it as you stood behind her! When she smiled, the corners might meet round her head. Her figure was worthy of her face. Her dress was worthy of her figure. Do not ask me, dear

ladies, what it was made of. All I can tell you is, that it was of a vivid green, and—for all the grace that it bestowed on, or borrowed from the wearer, it might have been a cabbage-leaf! Her hair, scraped off her gaunt face, was adorned with a green wreath, and to enliven the monotony of the tint, I suppose, both wreath and dress were bespangled with objects that were possibly intended for lady-birds—but the artificer was unskilled in entomology, and the effect of his workmanship may be inferred from Charlie's exclamation—

"Oh, grandmamma! it's Mrs. 'Gaby darling'—and she's all over *bugs!*"

A scarcely suppressed titter circulated upon this remark; and Major Graysbrooke came forward to present the pair to Lady Janet. But they were not graciously received, and Mrs. Gabriel was glad to hide her discomfiture among the undulating crowd that now surged towards the supper-room.

I watched, a little curiously, to see if Wentworth took the opportunity of renewing his old acquaintance with Miss Gilroyd — but no; he clung to Annie Barham with a devotion, which, twenty-five years ago, would have made me jealous; and it was I who had the happiness of escorting the fair Rosamond to the "manger." I exerted myself to the utmost to please my beautiful companion, and was as successful as, I may say, without vanity, I usually am with young ladies. Miss Gilroyd's frigid manner thawed—she became animated — almost gay — though with a somewhat hurried and fitful gaiety. More than once her brilliant eyes roved to the opposite side of the room, where Roland stood in attendance on Miss Barham; and Monica, who in the *mêlée* had been drifted to his side, stood there, apparently well content with the position, and in no haste to relinquish it.

"You are looking at Miss Graysbrooke,

Miss Gilroyd—does she not look charming to-night?"

"I think her always charming," she replied. "Ah, yes—you know her—she tells me you are a great friend of hers. Is Mr. Wentworth very intimate at Major Graysbrooke's?"

"We are all intimate at Cleobury," I answered, marvelling a little at the irrelevancy of the question; "our society is so limited, that it cannot be otherwise; and Monica has *hitherto* been the reigning belle and general favourite."

"She is an heiress, too, is she not? fortune has been very lavish to her in giving her sweetness, beauty, and wealth."

"There are some, Miss Gilroyd, to whom their beauty alone is an all-sufficient dower."

I flatter myself I said that, with just the degree of emphasis to point the allusion, without making it an impertinence. But she put it coldly by.

"Beauty," she said, "is a very fugitive

dower, but so is the more solid one of wealth, sometimes. Which of Miss Graysbrooke's attractions is the most powerful with Mr. Wentworth, do you think?"

My eyes followed hers, as she spoke, and rested on the pair opposite to us. Monica, all smiles and sparkle, and soft, childish, coquettish grace, was talking eagerly, with that pretty earnestness of hers which gave her always the air of having no thought but that of pleasing her captive of the moment, and even the severe Roland seemed yielding to the spell. He appeared quite unconscious of the wistful gaze that Rosamond bent on him; he was leaning over Miss Graysbrooke—his grave features lit up with the rare smile which was such an illumination to them, yet listening to her, it seemed to me, less with the homage a man pays to a pretty woman, than with the indulgence with which he hearkens to the prattle of an artless child.

And Monica is so artless! I scarcely

know from what impulse I turned from her to look for Sir Charles, who, at some distance from us, was doing the useful and amiable to an aged lady beside him. *He*, too, looked at Monica—that was natural enough—but his eyes rested but a moment on her, and then wandered to Rosamond, and as she met his glance, a bright blush crimsoned her very brow—a blush that might have meant anger, or bashfulness, or it might have indicated no emotion at all—there is nothing more inconsequent than a girl's blush!

CHAPTER XI.

MONICA REBELS.

A FEW days after the ball, I received a note written in a ladylike hand and graceful style, but with none of the feminine prettinesses of scented paper or tinted envelopes —a note from Lady Janet's fair secretary, intimating her superior's wish that I should wait on her at Heath Hill.

I yielded the prompt obedience I always yield to the commands of a lady, be she old or young, rich or poor, and went early in the afternoon. I knew that I was summoned to a female council, for the hounds met at Deerbrook that day, and Sir Charles, with most of his male followers, would be

there, as in duty bound. And a female council it was. It was held in Lady Janet's dressing-room.

The blind lady sat by a blazing fire, in a low and luxuriously-cushioned chair, wrapped in shawls and ermines like an impersonation of Winter, for the October frost had set in keen and sharp that day. In her slender white hands she held some knitting work, with which she frequently amused herself.

At a small table near her, littered with books and papers, sat Miss Gilroyd, looking, I thought, even handsomer, if less brilliant, than on the night I first saw her. On a low stool, at Lady Janet's feet, crouched Monica Graysbrooke, while Annie Barham, shawled and bonnetted, as if just come in, stood leaning against the mantel-piece, and looking down upon her.

Evidently a female council was being held, and one of some importance, too, for the elder lady's brow was contracted, and her

lips compressed with that "lay-down-the-law" look they always assumed when any one had been bold enough to question the decisions of her sovereign will. And who the rebel was I could guess, too, by the arch defiance in Monica's laughing eyes, half-coaxing, half-saucy, and by the gesture, partly conciliatory, partly admonitory, with which Annie's hand was laid on her shoulder.

As I entered, Lady Janet was saying, in her sharp clear voice, "I don't care, Monica, I tell you, I will not have it, I will be no party to any such folly. Is it Dr. Crofton?" (to Annie) "come here, Dr. Crofton, sit here, and tell me, did you know of my son-in-law's engagement to Miss Graysbrooke?"

Before I could answer, Monica broke forth petulantly, "Of Sir Charles's *proposal* to Miss Graysbrooke, you mean, Lady Janet—I will acknowledge no engagement on either side.—"

"My dear Monica," began Annie.

Monica shook off her remonstrative hand, and was going on, but Lady Janet stopped her.

"As you like, Miss Graysbrooke. Dr. Guy, did you know that Sir Charles had proposed to this young lady, and been accepted by her?"

Monica broke out again—she seemed determined to give me no opportunity for reply. "Of course he knows—everybody knows—though Sir Charles promised me that it should be a secret between us two; he has told you, he has told Miss Barham, and Dr. Crofton, no doubt—has he not, Dr. Guy?"

Thus urged, I was forced to confess that the Baronet's indiscretion had extended to me, and I was going to offer some excuse for the absent lover, when Lady Janet cut in once more, and silenced me.

"And why should he not tell Dr. Guy and all his intimate friends, Monica?"

"Only because he promised not," replied the damsel, with a toss of her shining head.

"Well, if he promised, he was wrong not to keep his word, certainly, but when people have made foolish promises they are apt to forget that their folly does not absolve them from their obligation, but *I* have made no promise of secrecy, and I consider it absurd and unreasonable, and by no means complimentary to Sir Charles, nor good for you, Monica; and I won't have it!"

And her ladyship closed her mouth with a snap, like a mouse-trap, and began knitting away as resolutely as if she were weaving the web of the Parcæ.

Then Annie's soft voice chimed musically in—

"You see you cannot have your own way, you bad child; all your friends are against you. And, indeed, my pet, why should you indulge in a caprice which annoys your lover, and which your father himself disapproves?"

"Why should she?" snapped the old lady, "I will tell you why, Annie Barham, it is because she knows that an acknowledged engagement to one man will at least pledge her, in the eyes of society, to some degree of maidenly decorum. And she is unwilling to give that pledge, unwilling that the authority of an affianced husband should at least restrain her from such indecent coquetries as she thought fit to amuse herself with last night."

"Indecent fiddlesticks!" retorted Monica, irreverently. "Dr. Crofton, do you know what Lady Janet is making such a fuss about? Just that I sang Mr. Temple's song, last night, to please him. Sir Charles asked for it too. 'Only for Thee;' it is rather sentimental, but how could I help that? I did not write the song. I only sang it."

"And *how* did you sing it?" asked her ladyship, severely. "Do you think, because I could not *see*, that I did not *hear*,

the expression you gave to a passionate love-ditty, with the writer, a young man in an inferior social position [here Rosamond coloured deeply] hanging over you all the time, and even whispering to you in the pauses of the music?"

"He was merely turning over the pages for me; and if he did whisper, it was only that he might not interrupt Sir Charles's *almost* whispered conversation with Miss Gilroyd."

There was so much significance in these words, that I looked at Rosamond, fully expecting that the challenge would be accepted, and the warfare carried into a totally different quarter. Not a bit of it. Either Miss Gilroyd understood the feint, or was too wary to be provoked out of her safe neutrality. She only smiled disdainfully, and Lady Janet "rushed on to the slaughter" over her foe-woman's shield.

"And was it out of consideration to Sir Charles, that you allowed his son's tutor to

kiss your hand, when he stooped down to pick up the music that you had—purposely, I fear—let fall ?"

"He did not kiss it, he merely touched it. That was an invention of that little story-teller, Charlie ; how can you attend to what such a spoiled, mischievous brat says ?"

Now that was naughty of Monica, very naughty : it was a stab aimed at the most sensitive point in Lady Janet's heart ; for she idolized her little grandson. A stab which had not even the excuse of being dealt in a passion, for there was a sly dimple quivering at the corner of the little vixen's mouth, that only wanted permission to break forth from its concealment, in a merry laugh. But Lady Janet could not see that. For a moment, she was actually silenced by the culprit's audacity ; but her face grew so fixed and stern, that Annie and I exchanged terrified glances, and I began to wish myself well out of the quarrel, though

only as a spectator. Rosamond sat perfectly still, never raising her eyes from the papers before her.

Spoke Lady Janet, very proud and cold, "I thank heaven, Miss Graysbrooke, that since Sir Charles will give *you* as step-mother to his child, my grandchild is not a daughter!"

Monica bounded to her feet, and caught both the hands of her harsh monitress—regardless of her efforts to disengage them, and regain her dropped knitting needles. "Do not talk like that! Do not look like that, Lady Janet! You must not say it—you do not mean—O forgive me! indeed I am not wicked. I was only in play—I meant no harm—and—I have no mother!"

And sobbing, she released the old lady's hands, only to throw her arms round her neck, with the pleading, fondling action of a penitent child. Who could have resisted her? Not Lady Janet; she melted at once. Perhaps, to the heart of the child-

less mother, the plaintive appeal struck home. She permitted, and at last returned Monica's caresses. She would have returned them ten-fold, could she have seen those rosy, trembling lips—those large blue eyes glittering through their tears—the full bosom rising and falling with heaving sobs. But the brief passion, brief as a summer shower, had passed away, before her reply had ended.

"Child!" she said, "you are not wicked now; and if your friends warn you from such *play* as you amused yourself with last night, it is, that you may never become wicked. The first steps that you take away from your maidenly dignity, will lead you to lower descents from womanly self-respect and wifely duty."

"But I am not a wife yet," pleaded the little damsel, an arch playfulness already shining through her contrition, "and I do not want to be a wife; and I really think the best thing you can do for Sir Charles,

is not to publish our engagement, but to let me break it off altogether."

"I will neither mend nor mar, Monica. My son did not consult me on this affair, and he had a perfect right to arrange it at his own discretion. But since you *are* engaged, I will not abet you in a concealment which can only be injurious to you, and to the foolish young men whom you encourage to flutter round you."

"Very well," answered Miss Graysbrooke; tired, it seemed, of this prolonged lecture; "tell everybody, if you like; I do not care. I do not mean to marry for ever so long. Papa does not wish me—and Sir Charles will be tired of waiting. I will torment him all the time, because he's a tell-tale, and takes after Charlie."

And with this strange inversion of hereditary laws, Monica arose, took up her hat and addressed me, "Dr. Guy, I am going home; ring the bell for them to bring my pony round, and put me on it—or Frank

Temple may—and then Lady Janet will bully me again."

I obeyed, of course; but as I was leaving the room with her, Lady Janet said, "Go with her to the Lodge, Dr. Guy, and see her safely off the premises, or that absurd lad will be making himself ridiculous by joining her."

"What lad?" enquired Monica innocently, "do you mean Charlie?"

"Oh, Charlie, of course," rejoined Lady Janet, with renewed asperity, "but hereafter Sir Charles shall take his proper place at your side, Miss Graysbrooke, and I trust he will be able to guard his future wife from associating on equal terms with his paid dependent."

"I will borrow Rosamond Gilroyd for my *dame de compagne*," laughed the perverse beauty, "and then we shall be a pleasant party *à quatre*, for I should get very tired of a *tête-à-tête* that should commence years before the honeymoon."

Miss Gilroyd smiled quietly, and shook her head at the girl reprovingly, but said not a word, and Monica gathered up her skirt and tripped to the hall door. I assisted her to mount her steady old pony, and walked down the avenue at her side; but before I could say a word she began deprecatingly :—

"Now, dear Dr. Guy, don't scold me, please don't. I have had scolding enough to last a year, and besides, I confess I have been very naughty; but you do not think me wicked, do you?"

Wicked! bless her little innocent heart. I should as soon have attributed wickedness to the robin that trilled its autumn song on the spray above her!

"I shall not scold you, Monica—you are not afraid of me I know—but my dear child, you must be more prudent—you must, indeed—what will poor Frank say, when he finds that you have been trifling with him all this time?"

"Ah, that is just where it is, Doctor; I have been very giddy and thoughtless, I am afraid—and I wanted Frank to hear nothing of this engagement—at least, not until he had gone away and had time to forget, and he is going soon, he has a situation offered him as secretary to Lord Marchmont, Sir Charles got it for him; if this could be kept from him—oh, dear Dr. Guy—do persuade Lady Janet to be silent for just a few weeks longer, and I will be so good for ever after."

I must own I was dismayed at the coolness of this proposal. Did the little wretch actually want to keep her engagement to one man a secret, lest it might interfere with her flirtation with another? I said very gravely:—

"If you would have me help you, Monica, you must be open with me. Since when does this—flirtation—with Frank date?"

"Oh, I do not know, he has made eyes at me ever since he came to Cleobury, you

know," she added naïvely, "there was no body else for him to make eyes at."

"Eyes, indeed!—Temple has been twelve months at Heath Hill, how could you think of encouraging Cotgrave's addresses, when you were all the while listening to those of his son's tutor?"

"But I was not," she answered, still with that infantine *naïveté*, "you know I had no one to talk to except Frank, for Sir Charles never came to The Cedars then, and when I was staying with Lady Janet Frank was not there, and Charles was. I believe he asked me to marry him, half in fun, and I said yes, without much meaning it either."

"And now you repent, and would rather marry Temple?"

"Marry Temple?—oh, dear no! he is such a *muff*. I shall be glad when he goes away; I am tired of him, and his music too."

Upon my life, I began to fear that Miss

Graysbrooke was just *a little* heartless. She read disapproval in my face, I suppose, for she suddenly dropped the reins on her pony's neck, and clasped her little gauntletted hands on my shoulder, as I walked beside her, leaning forward as she did so, so that I was forced to catch hold of her habit, lest a sudden movement of the horse might make her fall.

"Don't *you* be angry with me, too, dear Doctor Guy!" she murmured, in that soft, cooing voice, that might have wiled a falcon from its stoop. "I never could bear *that!*"

The little witch!—the flattering, delusive, seductive enchantress! I could not help, as I passed my arm round her waist —just to keep her from falling, you know— giving her just the least little squeeze— half admonitory, half caressing.

"Much you care, if I am angry or not, you deceitful girl! But if you have no feeling for Frank, I presume you have for

Sir Charles; and, in justice to him, you ought to allow him to make your engagement public, if only to put an end to your flirtations with other young men."

"I tell you," she cried, with such a delicious pout, as only lips like hers could frame, "I do not love anybody!—I only fancy I do, when they say they love me—that is my foolishness; and I do not wish to marry Sir Charles—I would a great deal rather marry *you*."

Marry *me!* the very suggestion nearly rolled me over. Of course it was merely said in playfulness—it *could* be nothing else—and yet—and yet—as I looked doubtingly, inquiringly into her tender eyes, I thought the light in them deepened and softened, and just a faint dream-blush tinged her cheek, as she averted her head—then, snatching up her reins, she shook them with a gay laugh, and trotted briskly on. But as she neared the lodge, she stopped again, and almost whispered—

"Dr. Guy, do persuade Lady Janet to give me my way this once, and I will do anything you tell me—I will try to fall in love with Sir Charles, if you wish it—if *you really* wish it!"

And without waiting for my answer, away she went. I stood gazing after her until she was out of sight. What a simple, candid, heedless fairy it is! Passionate love is an unfathomed mystery to her as yet—a man's heart is her plaything—a plighted faith is a bondage which presses as heavily on her sportive nature as golden fetters on a bird! Some men—vainer than I am—might be tempted by such words and looks to cherish a hope—which honour forbids to *me.* She cares neither for Temple nor Cotgrave! these young coxcombs think themselves so seductive—yet how easily could a man double their age, but more experienced in the wayward workings of female fancy — how easily might he win, where they have failed.

Guy Crofton, my friend, these are dangerous speculations—no treachery, even in thought, honest man! So far, at least, I have none to reproach myself with.

CHAPTER XII.

FRIENDS IN COUNCIL.

WHEN I rejoined the fair triumvirate in her ladyship's dressing-room, they were holding an animated discussion, that broke off suddenly as I entered. Could they have been suspicious, I wondered, of my prolonged *tête-à-tête* with Monica? But this idea was at once dispelled, by Lady Janet's frank address—

"Doctor," she said, "I did not send for you to witness our family altercations—for I suppose Miss Graysbrooke may be looked upon as belonging to the family, at least prospectively—I wanted to talk to you about myself; but that flighty girl came in,

and, between us, we have wasted your time, so that I fear you have not much left to spare me."

"My time is quite at your ladyship's disposal; the few engagements I had for this morning I transferred to my Assistant before I left home."

"Then, Lady Janet," said gentle Annie, "while you confer with Dr. Guy, will you let me borrow Miss Gilroyd for half-an-hour? She looks pale—a drive in the fresh air will do her good."

Rosamond made a faint gesture of refusal, but looked wistfully at her patroness, who answered in her sharp way—

"Yes, you may take her; but mind, Annie, do not spoil her with petting and indulgence — remember, she is here to fulfil her duties, and not to amuse herself."

The girl withdrew the hand Miss Barham had taken.

"I have no wish to amuse myself, Lady

Janet. I will go to my own room until you want me."

"Nonsense, child! go with Miss Barham —and learn to curb that temper of yours, or you and I shall fall out one day."

She quitted the room without a word, and as I closed the door, and returned to the old lady's side, that arrogant personage observed—

"That is a nice girl, Dr. Crofton, and a clever girl, and quite the gentlewoman; but she is too spirited for her position, and requires to be kept in check."

"Miss Gilroyd appears very docile and obedient, Lady Janet."

"So she is, she answers to the bit, as Charles would say, but she chafes overmuch under it; she is as haughty and bitter sometimes, as if she was a dethroned princess!"

"Where did your ladyship meet with her?"

"Lady Comberhill found her for me, in a

servants' home or a governesses' institution, or some such place; but never mind her just now. I sent for you, Dr. Crofton, to tell me frankly if there is any hope of my ever recovering my sight. The London oculists tell me there is none; but you better know my constitution and habits. You were so sagacious in your opinion about my poor lost daughter. I decline to accept the verdict of strange surgeons, unless you confirm it."

Alas! I knew too well that this sad confirmation was unavoidable. I had spoken with Dr. Anstruther in London, about Lady Janet's case, and although at her request, I examined her eyes minutely, the result was only to pronounce her loss irretrievable. She heard the sentence with fortitude, gave one low sigh, and leaned back in her chair in silence. From the movement of her lips, she seemed to be praying. Perhaps for resignation, or for *inward* light.

After a moment she addressed me again, in her usual manner:—

"Dr. Crofton, if I could only see my grandchild! is he like his dear mother?"

"I think not, Lady Janet, he resembles Sir Charles; he is a fine little fellow; you know his intelligence—his features express it."

"Ah! and Charles has chosen such a step-mother for him as Monica Graysbrooke! a silly, giddy, vulgar little coquette!"

"Vulgar? oh, Lady Janet!"

"*You* do not think her so, I daresay," she rejoined sharply; "you would not call any girl vulgar, unless she dropped her h's, or ate peas with her knife? but I, by your leave, have a higher standard of refinement; and when I think of the wife in whom Charles Cotgrave was once blessed,—of her delicate beauty, her grace and cultivation, the elegant lady she was!—I should be surprised, if at my age one could be

surprised at anything, that such a one as little Graysbrooke should be chosen to take —she can never *fill*—her vacant place!"

I cannot say that my memory at all reflected such an image of the late Lady Cotgrave as her mother described. Truth to tell, she had never been remarked for beauty either of face or form, nor had even her manners been generally considered agreeable. But she had been Lady Janet's beloved and only child—she had died young—and there is no living grace or glory like those with which Death is sanctified by Love!

"I had hoped," I said, "that Miss Monica was a favourite of your Ladyship's. Major Graysbrooke tells me that you have been very kind to her. I wonder since you disapprove of this marriage, that you refused to sanction him in breaking it off."

"I like the child well enough, in her proper place. I invited her to spend a few weeks with me at Scarborough, out of com-

pliment to that empty old prig of a Major, who has been civil and obliging to me when I have come down here (she spoke of him as if he had been a shopman). I had not an idea that Charles would have been such a fool as to propose to her; but since he has done so, I shall not expose myself to the charge of being a jealous, spiteful mother-in-law."

"But Monica herself proposed to break off the engagement."

"Monica! Dr. Guy, you are the dupe of a baby face and a childish manner," (was I?) "if Sir Charles freed himself to-morrow, Monica would never rest until she had lured him back into her toils, and bound him faster than ever—a little spider-hearted thing! She is always spinning snares for some admirer; do you think, although I am blind, I do not see that? Am I deaf to the sly flattery of words and tones, with which she weaves her webs? with which she caught my son-in-law in a

week—with which she caught that silly lout, Frank Temple—with which I should never be surprised if she caught *you*—aye, and your Mr. Wentworth as well! High or low, old or young, all are prey to Monica; if there was no one else in view, she is capable of trying to fascinate her stable-boy. I call this petty vanity vulgar in any girl, and I say Miss Graysbrooke is vulgar! Rosamond Gilroyd is far her superior in this."

"Excuse me, Lady Janet, your judgment is too harsh—women are seldom just to each other—you condemn as systematic coquetry, what is nothing but mere playfulness and gaiety of heart; Monica is modest and pure—"

"Pure?" interrupted the lady, "did I ever dispute that? no, indeed, or she should never, while I could prevent it, be Sir Charles Cotgrave's wife. She is, I grant you, modest and pure *now*—a girl of eighteen who is otherwise, is a monster.

But who can long guarantee the purity of any woman whose insatiate love of admiration is greater than her delicacy and self-respect?"

Oh dear! dear! it was very sad, Lady Janet had talked herself into such a fury, that if she went on much longer my poor, sweet little pet would have (metaphorically) not a leg left to stand upon! I hastened to advance another plea for her :—

"At least, madam, Miss Graysbrooke is sweet-tempered and kind-hearted. She is very young, too, and she is motherless. Your influence may do much for her."

Lady Janet gave a sort of grunt (if a lady of title may ever be said to grunt), that might have meant either acquiescence or dissent—I chose to interpret it as the former—

"And as for Frank Temple, he is a boy —a mere foolish boy—Major Graysbrooke has allowed him to come and go at The Cedars, before Sir Charles proposed to

Monica, and thus a habit of childish familiarity has been established, of which I am sure she will see the impropriety when—" (Oh, Guy Crofton! you are qualifying yourself to take a degree as Bachelor of Arts in a college of liars).

The indignant matron again interrupted me—

"All very well, my good friend. Mr. Frank Temple is going, this evening, I believe, on a few days' visit to some relatives —when he returns he shall know that the lady whom he presumes to admire, is his master's affianced wife; I will tell him that, myself, and more too, that it will be good for him to hear."

Wretched Frank Temple! thought I, and with a vague hope of sparing him some of the bitterness of the blow, I wished his enemy farewell, and proceeded to seek him in the schoolroom, but the schcolroom was empty, save for the goodly presence of Sir Charles's valet, who lay stretched full length

on a sofa, studying a number of "Punch." He started to his feet in guilty confusion, when he beheld me.

"Mr. Temple, sir? oh, yes, certainly! Mr. Temple is gone to Lingford, Dr. Crofton —to the station, I believe, and Master Cotgrave is out with the keeper, on his pony."

"All right! by the way, Wilson, have you seen my dog?"

This question referred to Wentworth's Vixen, who was now on such friendly terms with me that she not unfrequently honoured me with her company when her master chose to decline it, and whom I had left to await me in the hall when I went up to Lady Janet.

"Mr. Wentworth's Vixen, is it, sir?—she followed Miss Barham and Miss Gilroyd when they drove out, half an hour ago, but Miss Gilroyd has just come in, sir, and I daresay the dog is with her."

On receiving this information, I left Mr. Wilson to his literary amusements, and was

crossing the hall, when seeing the door of the dining-room ajar, I peeped in, in search of my canine companion, and lo! I beheld a very mysterious sight.

On a low chair, near the window, sat Rosamond Gilroyd, quite alone, and on her lap sat Mr. Wentworth's bull terrier—an odd lap-dog for a lady, and odder still, in that Vixen, was as a rule, averse to strangers, and by no means accustomed to be nursed. Yet there she sat, very complacently, and evidently gratified by the caresses showered upon her, for Rosamond's arms were round the dog, holding it clasped close to her beautiful breast. Her graceful head was bent over the blunt muzzle of the brute, while, with low murmurs, she lavished upon it kisses—oh! such kisses!—If a dog's brain possessed half the sensibility that canine admirers claim for it, Vixen must have died on the spot of delirium tremens from sheer intoxication of delight!

I drew back softly, for Rosamond's dark eyelashes—I could not see her eyes—were glittering with diamond dew; I drew back into the hall, and whistled for Vixen, but she did not come—she was not such a fool! I walked away down the carriage-drive, gnashing my teeth with spite and envy! Heaven forgive me, I forgot all about Frank Temple, and Cotgrave, and pretty Monica! To think of such a beautiful girl sitting lonely, wasting the sweetness of her fragrant lips upon a black-mouthed, snub-nosed cur! ugh!

Vixen came running up, before I reached the lodge, and I greeted her with a kick that astonished her! I would have given her another, but she declined it, and showed her teeth with a snarl, so I walked on, sullenly ruminating.

What could this mean? Wentworth's dog? My Assistant's dog?—there is a mystery somewhere. That sly fellow, Roland, his impenetrable reserve had baffled

me hitherto—he had never named Miss Gilroyd. He had never been to Heath Hill since she came there, and but for the formal and cold recognition at the ball, I should have supposed he had never seen her before in his life.

Why should she fondle his dog? I swore a solemn oath, by the head of Anubis! by the tail of Sirius (if he has got a tail), that I would find out the explanation of this mystery, and in the eagerness of my curiosity—my interest, I mean—the bright face of sunny Monica faded from my fancy, and in its place uprose the stately form, the pensive brow, and radiant eyes of that beautiful Dogolatress. *She* was now my "Cynthia of the minute," my "Insect Queen!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A SENSATIONAL INCIDENT.

SUCH a lovely morning! so clear, so bright, so fresh! Such a morning as sometimes surprises us, breaking through the fogs of "drear November," as if Winter stepped aside for a day, that Summer might cast one backward look on us to wave a smiling adieu!

What shall I do? How can I best "improve these shining hours?" as Dr. Watts sings? Why, by following the example of his bees, to be sure, "and gather honey all the day, from every blooming flower." And *my* flowers, I know, are blooming at Heath Hill, this morning, for Sir Charles

sprained his wrist pretty severely a few days since, and there is no riding nor shooting for him, poor fellow, for a week to come, and the ladies, I know well, with Lady Janet at their head, will consider it their bounden duty to devote themselves to the task of consoling him.

As I came down late to breakfast, I saw Major Graysbrooke whiz down the street, with little Monica trotting beside him. Gone, of course, to help to entertain the sufferer. It would be but neighbourly in me to go too. So I ring for my boots. Just as I am leaving the room in comes Mrs. Pritchard again.

"Please Dr. Guy, Mrs. Hartopp wants you to look in at Rosebank this morning."

"Does she? she may want then. I am not going to Rosebank this day. Mr. Wentworth must call when he comes in. What's amiss?"

"She left word, you are wanted very

bad; she's sure there's something wrong with her husband's *sarcophagus.*"

"Ah! her first husband, I suppose?"

"La, Dr. Guy, she never had no other; she says, he do make such queer noises in his sleep, but he don't take much notice of it hisself."

"I dare say not; a man usually sleeps too sound in his sarcophagus, to take much notice of any noise there. If his sarcophagus is out of order, the stone-mason is the man to send for. Make way, old lady, I cannot stop to listen to your translations of Mrs. Hartopp's chatter."

I make off, regardless of Mrs. Pritchard's look of reproof at the levity with which I spoke of "Gaby darling's" afflictions, and when I arrived at Heath Hill, I saw Sir Charles standing at the hall door, one hand in a sling, the other in his pocket, gazing dejectedly at a little knot of sportsmen, who with keepers, dogs, and guns, were rapidly receding from view, in a dis-

tant turnip-field. He brightened up when he caught sight of me.

"Hallo, Crofton, my good fellow, it is kind of you to call so early; it is an awful bore to be left solitary on such a day as this, and see all one's friends going off to enjoy themselves."

"But how are you solitary, Sir Charles? I thought I saw Major and Miss Graysbrooke on their way here?"

"So you did; but the Major has gone off with the shooting party, and Monica is with the other ladies, in my mother's morning-room—they won't show till lunch. I say, Crofton, will you come through the Home Coppice with me, and look at the larches I am felling there. Splendid trees they are—but timber is so low just now, they will scarcely pay for the cutting down."

I agreed to accompany him through the coppice, and look at the larches, since there seemed no probability of my seeing any-

thing more attractive before lunch time, when, as we lounged through the plantation, Sir Charles suddenly exclaimed—

"Bless me! if that boy of mine has not escaped from his grandmother, and come out here by himself; we shall have Lady Janet half wild when she misses him."

"Charlie is too thorough a boy for petticoat government—he is even too much for Temple. Why do you not get him another tutor, Sir Charles?"

"And the tutor himself would be under petticoat government," laughed the Baronet, "for whoever is to rule Charlie must be ruled by Lady Janet. I shall send him to school in the spring; he is always in mischief, the young scamp."

Just then, however, Charlie did not seem to be in any mischief whatever. He was sitting on the block formed by the severance of the trunk of a tree, near the root, gazing with a child's intentness on the woodsman who had recently felled a larch and was

now cutting off the branches. His arm was round the neck of a beautiful, silky-haired setter spaniel, and so earnestly was he watching "the bright and flying chips," that he took no notice of his father, who paused in admiration of the pair.

"Now, Dr. Crofton, I may say, without partiality, there is a couple that you will not match in the county for beauty. That boy is barely six years old, and he's afraid of nothing. He can give a view-hallo as well as old Jenkin the huntsman, and he'll sit his little pony over any ditch or fence that 'Monboddo' can take! And that dog shall be painted with him when I have his portrait taken—is she not perfect? Look at her head! look at her coat! As for her tail, there's no lady wears an ostrich feather can match it!"

"Take care no lady hears you, Sir Charles, lest she set a fashion of wearing dog's tails in her hat, as Aurelia Comberhill sports a fox's brush in hers."

"Oh, as for Aurelia—Hallo! what are you doing here, my man?"

The question was addressed to a surly-looking fellow, who came slouching up from behind the fallen tree. He pulled off his greasy cap, displaying a shock head of hair like tow, and a countenance decidedly unprepossessing.

"Please your honour, I am Jack Morris, of Nettledale."

"You are, are you? You have pretty good cheek to show yourself in my grounds at all; you have notice to quit your cottage at Lady-day, for snaring my hares in the wood."

"Them is the keeper's lies, Sir Charles. I'll defy any man to prove I ever set a snare in my life. The keeper wants my cottage for his niece who married one of the under-keepers. I hope you will not heed him. I've lived at Nettledale these ten year, and it 'll be hard to turn me out of the old place."

"Then you ought to have behaved yourself better when you were in it—out you go at Lady-day. Come clear out of this this minute—don't be insolent, my man."

And the fellow drew back, muttering something that sounded like a malediction on somebody.

"Come along, Crofton. Charlie, you go in to your grandmamma, before she sends after you, or you'll catch it."

"Who is that Jack Morris?" I asked; "for as long as I have known the place, I don't remember him?"

"You have not met him, probably. He pretends to work for a farmer in the next parish; but he is an idle vagabond, and the keepers have had some work with him. I have made up my mind to get rid of him; the parish will have no loss."

We continued our walk round the coppices, and were returning to the house by the same way we had set out, when, just

as we approached the spot where the trees had been felled, our ears were startled by a frightful yell, followed instantly by a child's piercing shriek, and at the same instant Charlie came flying along the path, his tunic all dyed in blood, followed by Morris, holding in his hand a blood-stained axe. Uttering shriek after shriek, the child flung himself into my arms, and the man stopped short. Sir Charles grew ghastly pale, and reeled up against the nearest tree, gasping out—

"Powers above! he has murdered my boy!"

"Not he, Sir Charles—murdered boys never holloa like that! Hold up, Charlie! what's the row?"

But, without heeding me, the maddened father sprang at the throat of the suspected assassin, seizing it with his one hand, with a gripe that would soon have put him "past praying for," had not the victim interposed, releasing himself from my em-

brace by a series of adroitly delivered kicks, as he cried—

"It wasn't him, papa! he didn't do it—it was me!"

The Baronet relaxed his grasp, and Morris shook himself free, muttering—

"If so be I *had* done it, Sir Charles, you didn't ought to kill me. A poor man's life is worth more nor a bitch's tail, any day."

Our eyes followed his, and lo! on the block beyond us lay the spaniel's gory, dissevered tail, and beside it sat Silver, uttering plaintive yelps, as she licked the mutilated stump!

The piteous spectacle elicited a fresh burst of weeping from Charlie, and Morris had to explain. The child had taken advantage of the woodman's absence for his dinner, to take up his hatchet, and was imitating (as he afterwards told us himself) the murder of John the Baptist, which he had seen in a painting, with a fir-cone for

the martyr's head, when by an unguarded movement, Silver had substituted her tail for the saintly caput—and, alas! *left* it, as well as laid it, on the fatal block! Before this explanation was ended, Sir Charles had regained his composure.

"Did I not tell you that brat was always in mischief?" he asked, while he looked fondly, gratefully on his unharmed treasure. "I never could have believed that I could have felt so light-hearted at seeing Silver's beauty spoiled for ever! Come along, you young rascal; you will want a clean frock, I guess. Morris, take up that dog to the kennels, and tell Smith to see to her directly. I'll give you another term at Nettledale—but mind, if I hear any more complaints of you, it will be good-bye to you, once for all. Good heavens, Crofton! I really thought he had killed my boy!"

Lunch was over when we got back to the house. The ladies, the butler told us,

were in the south garden, and we hastened to join them there. Lady Janet, well shawled and cushioned, was sitting in the sun, with her knitting-needles in full play; Monica crouched on a stool at her feet, reading aloud a number of the *Quarterly*—a task not much to the young lady's taste, to judge by the impatient glances she kept turning on the pages, to see how much there was left to finish. Rosamond Gilroyd stood a few yards distant, at her easel, sketching a group of trees.

Having paid my *devoirs* to the old lady, I left Sir Charles to horrify her and Monica by his account of the highly sensational incident of which poor Silver had been the victim, while I went to Rosamond's side. She had dropped the slightly repellent manner I had at first observed in her, and was charming in her grace and frankness. I congratulated her on possessing an accomplishment that gave so pleasant a variety to her somewhat monotonous duties, and

hinted that Lady Janet was certainly indulgent in permitting her an occupation from which, poor thing, she could herself derive no pleasure.

"Yes," she answered, indifferently, "Lady Janet is considered unusually indulgent, I believe; but as this is my first situation, perhaps I am not so appreciative as I ought to be of its advantages. Those sketches?—yes, they are mine; all landscapes, you see. I am not successful in figures."

"Here is a figure, Miss Gilroyd, that disproves that assertion — it is sketched with much truth and spirit."

I held up to her a drawing, representing a charming woodland scene—a forest glade, it seemed, through which the twilight was gathering. At the foot of a delicate silver birch was seated a female figure, in an attitude expressive of utter desolation. Her hands lay listlessly on her lap, her head was bowed upon her breast; at her feet

was a dog, for whose portrait Roland's Vixen might have stood, with its paws on her knee, and its head turned, as if seeking to draw her attention to a masculine form, dimly vanishing in the distance, on which was falling one last faint sunset ray, that left all else in shadow.

"Here is a painting which tells a very common story, with uncommon grace. One cannot help hoping the lover will look back, and then *turn* back, after all."

"He never will," answered Rosamond, emphatically; and taking the sketch from my hand, she quietly replaced it in the portfolio, adding—"These pictured stories, Dr. Crofton, are as immutable as Fate. It is a long time since I drew that birch. I am trying to perfect myself by drawing that one yonder. How truly does the poet style that tree 'the lady of the woods!'—look at it, where it rears its silvery shaft among the dark firs, and shakes out its

golden spangles against the blue of the autumn sky!—is it not beautiful?"

"Very beautiful!" I answered, but I was not looking at the tree.

"Is the birch your favourite, as it is mine, Dr. Crofton?"

"Well, no, associations have a great deal to do with taste, and with me the associations connected with the birch are not such as to make it very attractive. In young ladies, I believe, it has never furnished the educational stimulus which has ranked it among the least endearing memories of boyhood."

Rosamond laughed sweetly. "Oh, Dr. Crofton! I never could have expected such prosaic allusions from *you*. Miss Graysbrooke has told me that you are so sentimental and poetic! I am quite disappointed in you."

"Nay, Miss Gilroyd, to regain your good opinion, I will to-morrow plant your favourite tree in my *pleasaunce*, at Rosebank,

in full view of the drawing-room window, and thenceforth it will be associated in my mind not with academic groves, but with very bowers of Eden! Will you give me that sketch to reward me for the promise? I should like my friend Wentworth to see it—he has good taste in painting."

But Rosamond froze directly. "No," she said, "I never give away my drawings, and I do not care to have Mr. Wentworth's opinion of them." Then, as if remorseful for her rudeness, she beamed on me the loveliest smile, and added, "But you shall plant the tree, notwithstanding, Dr. Crofton!"

And so I did; the very next day, too. I planted it on the lawn, close by a little grotto, that Monica, when a girl at school, had persuaded me to build to her fancy—there were several such complimentary memorials at Rosebank—I am rather fond of

recording my souvenirs in this manner. When these decorations become inconveniently numerous, why, I abolish the *oldest* of them!

CHAPTER XIV.

EXPLOSIVE.

"Thou only hast stept unaware,
Malice, not one can impute,
And why should a heart have been there,
In the way of a woman's foot?"

E. B. BROWNING.

ROLAND came in to dinner, looking very bright and fresh. My knight of the rueful countenance had now warmed well to his work, and it seemed to agree with him; he was grave still—that was his nature, I fancied,—but there was more of hopeful buoyancy about him than when he first came to Cleobury. There is such elasticity in healthy twenty-seven!

He had received good news of his brother, who had reached New Zealand in safety, and who wrote in good spirits and in a cheerful tone, of his future. Those Wentworths, it appears, are men of tough fibre, who will not cringe abjectly to the fickle goddess Fortune, whether she smile or frown on them.

We got on capitally together, Roland and I. He was just a little imperious, considering that he was so much my junior, and only My Assistant, as yet, but I did not mind that—he took his full share of the hard work, and a little more, and never seemed to care for amusement, and as for the night-bell, of which I had, every year, an increasing horror, why, bless me! I almost think he liked it! And all our patients liked him—he was a favourite everywhere, and with everybody—except with the girls—and *there*, I may say without vanity, that I held my own; he had certainly not the art of ingratiating himself

with the fair sex—he was as coldly indifferent to all their pretty ways as if he had been a patriarch (only, I believe, such indifference was not a characteristic of the patriarchs). Mrs. Hartopp had taken into her head to circulate, all through the parish, a rumour that Mr. Wentworth intended to marry an heiress, and valued himself at fifteen thousand pounds. But when I told him of it, he only laughed, and said the next thing Mrs. Gabriel would do would be to choose the heiress for him; on which she had the impudence to say that Miss Barham might do for him, as she was evidently tiring of *me!*

Miss Barham, indeed! why she is old enough to be his mother! and as for tiring of me, I wish I could think so—it would spare me some self-reproach. Poor dear Annie!

"Wentworth!" I said to him, that evening, as we sat together over our walnuts, "I believe you knew Miss Gilroyd formerly

—is she the niece of the man who ruined your brother?"

"She is—her uncle bought a princely estate adjoining my brother's, and lived there in princely magnificence; he brought up Miss Gilroyd, as his destined heiress, and I met her often at Wallingrove."

"You knew her intimately?"

"I did not say so; I said I met her often."

"Yet you did not greet her very cordially when you met her again at Heath Hill."

He made no answer.

"Was it the first time you have met since her uncle's death?"

"Yes, I did not know what had become of her, until I heard her name mentioned, the day we dined at Heath Hill."

"You might have shown a little more attention to an old acquaintance—in adversity, too."

"Miss Gilroyd is probably not anxious to renew her acquaintance with any of those

whose presence must remind her of that adversity. By the way, Dr. Crofton, what message did you send Mrs. Hartopp, this morning?"

"I sent her no message."

"What message did she send *you*, then?"

"Oh, some nonsense about her husband's throat—I daresay he has hurt it with snoring. Pritchard said 'something was wrong in his sarcophagus,' and I told her the stone-mason was the man to see to that."

"There it is!" cried My Assistant, with a burst of laughter, "I met Mrs. Hartopp, to-day, in a screaming fury, she said she had sent to you to come to darling Gaby, and you had desired her to send for old Mason, the cow doctor!"

"That old fool, Pritchard! I'll just call her, and—"

But just then came a sharp peal at the door-bell, presently followed by the appear-

ance of Mrs. Pritchard, who announced "Mr. Temple."

The moment my eyes rested on the visitor, I saw that the inexorable Lady Janet had pronounced his doom; and prepared myself to receive more love confidences—but doleful and tragical ones.

The youth's manner was hurried and excited, his face was flushed, his eyes were wild. Poor fellow! I fear her ladyship had *not* "done her spiriting gently."

He took no notice of my offered hand, nor of the chair that Wentworth rose to place for him, but walked close up to me, as if he meant to walk over me, and glaring first at me, then at Roland, said in a harsh, strained voice—

"Did you know of this, Dr. Crofton?—Mr. Wentworth, did *you*?"

"Know what, my dear boy?" I answered, soothingly, "but never mind, sit down and take a glass of wine, and we'll talk it all over quietly."

"Wentworth!" he repeated, "did you know that for nearly two months Sir Charles Cotgrave has been the plighted husband of Monica—oh, heavens!" he broke off suddenly, "my Monica!" and he dropped into a chair, and hid his face in his hands in a burst of childish weeping.

Roland and I exchanged pitying glances, and I went to Temple's side, and laid my hand on his shoulder—

"Come, come, my good fellow, don't give way—be a man, Frank! you have dreamed a romance, and have awoke from it, but life has pleasant things in store for you yet!"

He shook off my hand, angrily, and said fiercely—

"You have deceived me, Dr. Crofton—you, and Miss Barham, and Wentworth—all my friends have deceived me; you knew that Monica was making my heart her plaything—she was welcome to that, I don't blame *her*, but *you*—you who laughed among yourselves at my folly, as you might

smile at the visions of a madman, while you humoured them—you have betrayed me, all of you,—and you talk of what life has in store for me! I will tell you what it has *not*—can never have again—faith in man's loyalty, in maiden's truth; what can you ever give me in exchange for these?"

"Listen to me, Frank; you are unjust to your friends. Miss Barham and I received Sir Charles's confidence under pledge of secresy, Miss Graysbrooke herself did not know that we were aware of her engagement, and Wentworth has learnt it, for the first time, from your lips. We, at least, have not been disloyal to you. Have we ever ceased to warn you of the imprudence of an attachment which would have been almost equally misplaced, even had Monica been free?"

He caught eagerly at that word.

"Free? no, she is not free; she has yielded for a moment to the lure of wealth and position. Perhaps she repents already

of her bondage. If I were but sure of that—"

Roland's deep voice broke in, grave and stern, "And if it were so, Frank Temple, would you profit by the vacillation of a weak and unprincipled woman, to disgrace her in the world's eyes, as she must already be humbled in her own? Is a man's love worth no more than this? that it can humiliate and degrade, where it should elevate and strengthen?"

The poor foolish fellow shrank and cowered beneath the harsh accents of his reprover.

"No—no," he said; "I didn't mean—I only meant—but oh, Wentworth! if only I might hope that she was not *quite* false! that her soft words—her sweet, tender smiles—were not cruel treachery and mockery, which she despised me for believing!"

"What else could they be?" asked the relentless Roland; "she is the plighted

wife of your employer. If she is true to him, how can she be other than false to *you*. But is she really true to either ?"

Here I felt it incumbent on me to break a lance in the lady's defence.

"I am sure, Frank, it will be no solace to you, to think hardly of Monica. She has been thoughtless and imprudent, but I know she has the kindest feeling for you, and has been led into giving you too much encouragement, from mere unwillingness to inflict pain. You will forgive her, and keep silence for her sake on what has passed between you. You will not further your own wishes, by injuring *her*."

"Injure her? Dr. Crofton, I will die for her."

"Forget her, rather!" said Roland, "such a woman is as little worth dying for as living for."

But he preached in vain. The miserable young man glared at him with hollow eyes.

"You have never loved," he cried, "or never loved such a one as Monica. Oh, sweet and gentle! he shall not have her—he will neglect her—he neglects her already! I have seen how his eyes follow that girl, Rosa Gilroyd."

But with a bound, My Assistant was beside him, grasping his arm with a force that was almost violence.

"Silence!" he thundered; "how dare you attempt to soothe the wounds of your own paltry vanity, by breathing on the name of a lady, whose holy purity shames the frivolous lightness of a girl who is not worthy to be named beside her!"

Hallo! here was 'conciliation' with a vengeance! I hastened to mediate; "Don't quarrel, young fellows, whatever you do. No lady's name shall be trifled with in *my* house. Roland! I am ashamed of you! Why, Mrs. Pritchard can hear you roaring, down stairs. Come, sit down; here's a fresh bottle of Burgundy—draw the cork,

and fill Temple's glass. You are over-excited Frank, we will adjourn the debate, if you please. Did you hear of your pupil's exploit this morning? He performed an amputation on poor Silver with as much skill as if he had studied in a V. C. S."

Roland obeyed my directions, looking a little confused. Frank was silent and absent at first, and filled his glass repeatedly; although, as I shrewdly suspected, Lady Janet's revelation had been made to him *after* dinner, and when he had already had as much wine as was good for him. Soon he grew loquacious and noisy, talking volubly, though he carefully avoided all mention of Sir Charles.

Then Wentworth rose quietly, and rang the bell for coffee, and by the time we had finished that, and added the (to me) infrequent indulgence of a cigar each, Temple had calmed down again to his usual manner, though he still looked flushed and heated. But when Roland proposed to

walk back with him to Heath Hill, he broke into open rebellion.

"Never!" he shouted; "I will never sleep under Sir Charles Cotgrave's roof again! Dr. Crofton, you will let me sleep here to-night; in the kitchen—on that sofa —anywhere—if not, I will go to the Inn, for to Heath Hill I return no more."

It was useless to combat this resolve; he grew so wild, that Roland and I exchanged significant glances, and finally, I arranged him a shake down on the sofa, for I hardly liked to trust him in the village, and I hoped in the morning to persuade him to hear reason, and not ruin his own prospects and perhaps injure Miss Graysbrooke, by an "esclandre" that would necessarily compromise her in some degree. It was past midnight when we separated.

I speedily fell asleep, and dreamed that I saw Monica, arrayed in Sir Charles's hunting breeches and top-boots, much too long for her; while Sir Charles stood by

her, in his little son's tunic and knicker-bockers, much too short for him; and the oddly dressed pair were engaged in trying to thrust Rosamond Gilroyd "bodily" into the skin of a pug dog! The hide must have been very elastic, for she was stuffed in and sewed up in it; but alas! just as they were admiring the tight fit—bang! it burst asunder, with a detonation that shattered both skin and dream.

I started wide awake in the darkness, and thought hazily "It's those cursed chemicals of Roland's—he is always messing with them in the surgery, after I am gone to bed."

Here I heard him open his door, and rush down stairs, "Gone to look after his bottles, careless fellow!" But then came a sound of hurrying feet, and then a woman's shriek, Mrs. Pritchard's for a thousand! rose wild and shrill through the night. I leaped out of bed, and was hastily groping for my garments, when, heedless of

decorum, she bounced headlong into the room: "Oh! Dr. Guy—oh, come quick! Mr. Temple has been and blowed his brains out!!"

END OF VOL. I.

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